Blockchain Copyright Symposium: Summary Report
Kluwer Copyright Blog
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On the 5 July 2017, the Institute for Information Law (IViR) of the University of Amsterdam organized its Blockchain Copyright Symposium. The symposium consisted of two parts, the first part, following an introduction by IViR boss Jan van Den Berg, three other experts (Chao Jiang, Becky Brook, and Xavier Costaz) delivered short presentations on the legal, business, and technical implications of Blockchain technology for copyright. In the second part, the year was spent for discussion between the presenters and the audience. What follows is a summary of part one and the impression presentations.

Part I: Presentations

The symposium kicked off with a short presentation by Balázs Bodó, who briefly introduced the technology, Balázs noted blockchain essentially as the representation of artifice in the online world through tokenization of digital tokens. These tokens can be digital copies of copyright works; they can also refer to rights, license terms or payment for the use of works. The technology allows tokenization of these tokens (e.g. "smart contracts") as well as the creation of reliable and transparent transaction records without the need for a trusted intermediary.

Due to its low transaction costs, blockchain technology in the copyright field is of high interest. Yet, despite that, blockchain technology has not been adopted on a large scale, mainly because of its perceived disadvantages, such as low transaction speed and high energy consumption. However, this is changing, and blockchain technology is increasingly seen as a promising solution for various copyright-related problems.

Daniel started by defining blockchain as a distributed and decentralized database (ledger) supported by cryptography, which allows to keep a record of information about a large number of transactions. This information is recorded in "blocks" that are added to the chain and can be verified (or validated) using a cryptographic hash function. Each block contains a "proof of work" that is calculated by a network of computers, which are rewarded with cryptocurrency for their efforts.

Becky. She believes that blockchain can play a central role in the management of intellectual property (IP) rights. As she explained, the main advantage of blockchain technology is its ability to provide transparent, tamper-proof records of transactions, which can be used to track the ownership and use of digital assets. In the music industry, for example, blockchain technology can be used to keep track of sales and payments, as well as to verify the ownership of songs and albums. This can help to reduce the uncertainty and opacity that currently exist in the music industry, where it is difficult to determine who owns a particular song or album.

Part II: Discussion

In the discussion following the presentations, the first major topic to surface was whether blockchain constitutes a real novelty in the rights management field. The panelists had different views, with some认为ow that blockchain is a new technology that offers a unique solution for copyright-related problems, while others认为 that blockchain is not a new technology and that its applications are similar to existing systems.

A related issue that came up was whether blockchain offers a solution for stakeholders' disagreements in their respective systems and management databases. In this case, the consensus was that blockchain can provide a unique solution for stakeholder disagreement by enabling transparent and verifiable transactions, which can reduce the need for intermediaries in copyright management.

Finally, the discussion turned to whether blockchain should be considered a tool that is beneficial for working within collective rights management, and need not be considered disruptive or revolutionary.
In closing, it appears that blockchain technology presents an opportunity to improve online music licensing and rights management, especially standardization of rights ownership information. Exactly how much of an improvement it will make, however, is hard to tell. The potential of the technology justifies some of the hype, but the discussion also notes that it’s too early to call it revolutionary for copyright. Rather, it appears to be an agent for incremental change that will hopefully increase the efficiency and transparency of their services, while offering artists an additional avenue for direct licensing.

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