

Delving deeper blockchain

The Global Inclusive Blockchain Conference shed more light on the various issues surrounding blockchain technology

PHOTO: ISTOCK

FRANCIS KAN

REGULATION and standards, as well as security and data privacy, are some of the various issues discussed by prominent practitioners, thought leaders and scholars on the second day of the Global Inclusive Blockchain Conference.

The event was the first bilingual conference on blockchain technology jointly organised by the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and Chinese blockchain firm Longhash.

The second day's opening address was given by associate professor Lee Pui Mun, dean of SUSS School of Business, who said that the school was happy to see the exchange and interaction between industry experts and students. He recognised that blockchain technology could potentially change or redefine many businesses.

A key theme of the conference was inclusive finance and the role that blockchain would play in this growing trend.

Mr Ke Qiao, chief executive officer of MediShares, a blockchain firm that operates in the insurance market in China, said: "Blockchain technology can play an important role in establishing and maintaining trust, and preventing risks. It promotes efficiency and reduces costs for the insurance industry."

Despite its potential benefits, however, the technology also faces various challenges in gaining widespread adoption, noted some speakers.

Ms Sherry Lee, chief operating officer of blockchain technology firm Scry, said that traditional companies would find it relatively

difficult to adopt blockchain as it involves fairly advanced technology.

"On one hand, it is a technical problem. On the other hand, it is a question of talent demand," she said, adding that Scry aims to promote the development of this ecosystem and make it easier for all parties to enter the blockchain field.

Potential solution to the fake news problem

The speakers also highlighted the potential for blockchain to solve the issue of how one could determine whether online information was credible.

Mr Peng Wu, co-founder of Primas, a cryptocurrency ecosystem said that his company had created a protocol that could verify the source of digital information through the blockchain network.

"We will add content credibility information, include the time it was disseminated, and put a traceability mark on it," he added.

"As of now, when a piece of information is spread, no one knows its origin. Yet anyone can tamper with it. But having tamper-proof information will enable us to better determine to what extent an article is true."

Linking up the chains

Some experts also urged individual blockchains that are currently isolated to be joined so that they can work as one.

"Our view is that the blockchain ecosystem must ultimately be the same across the world. We are more concerned about cross-chain technology, so we talk to many cross-chain start-up companies and teams," said Mr Chen

Li, product director of WanCloud, a blockchain technology firm.

A blockchain can be public, private, or a hybrid of both. A public blockchain is a purely decentralised network that is an open source, while a private blockchain is run by enterprises. A hybrid model is typically referred to as an alliance or a consortium chain, where members can decide what records remain public and what should be confined to a private group.

Mr Aimin Qi, a professor at Chongqing University, was optimistic about cross-chain technology as he feels that it will help the demarcation between public, private and alliance chains to fade away slowly.

Proof of property ownership

In his keynote address, Mr Clay Lin, chief information security officer at World Bank Group, spoke about the development organisation's blockchain agenda.

One use of blockchain that the World Bank is exploring is how the technology can be used to verify land ownership.

Mr Lin cited the example of people who lost their homes during the tsunami that devastated parts of Asia in 2004. Many homeowners were unable to provide proof of their property ownership after the disaster.

"Imagine I am one of the affected. I return to my damaged homeland. How can I prove that I used to live here? This is a big problem. These people have no way of proving that their land belongs to them as there is no record," he said.

He noted that several countries are now working with the World



Associate professor Lee Pui Mun, dean of SUSS School of Business, gave the opening address on the second day of the conference. PHOTOS: SUSS

Blockchain technology can play an important role in establishing and maintaining trust, and preventing risks. It promotes efficiency and reduces costs for the insurance industry.

MR KE QIAO
chief executive officer
MediShares

Bank to see if they can use blockchain to solve this issue.

"Recorded data in blockchain cannot be changed and becomes transparent. So no matter how property rights are traded, its records are always there."

Standards for digital assets

Another issue facing blockchain is the lack of a unified financial standard for digital currencies.

Currently, some companies treat these currencies as intangible assets, while others, such as investment firms, classify them as financial assets.

"At the moment, there is no unified standard for which accounting items are included in these digital assets."

"The question is how we can have a common specification for these digital assets," said Ms Cindy Fang, co-founder and chief financial officer of BKFUND.

However, she believed common financial standards for such assets would soon emerge.

"People will, according to their needs, combine the characteristics of different assets, invent a category that can be applied exclusively to digital assets, and standardise it," she said.

Security and data privacy

Several speakers also touched on the issue of data privacy, and the risk stemming from the fact that many public-linked systems do not offer sufficient protection on this front.

To avoid data breaches and misuse, they urged blockchain development to focus on addressing this issue.

"Why did Facebook's data privacy leak have such a big impact? This is mainly because the process of data collection is very easy and the data is very centralised. Facebook's data is concentrated in one company," said Mr Wan Zhiguo, an associate professor at the School of Computer Science, Shandong University.

"But many people believe that their data are personal assets." But he added that measures to protect privacy cannot be implemented at the expense of efficiency.

"So we need to strike a good balance between privacy and efficiency in order to promote the progress and development of the blockchain industry."

The two-day conference attracted over 1,000 participants and close to 270,000 viewers online.

Parallel sessions on the second day covered topics such as artificial intelligence, big data and female participation in the blockchain industry.

Youth inject a fresh perspective

TECH-SAVVY youth are making their mark on the exciting blockchain industry as they set up businesses to ride on the wave of this new technology.

On April 17 and 18, the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) jointly organised the Global Inclusive Blockchain Conference at its Clementi campus with Chinese blockchain firm Longhash.

Magnetic appeal

The second day of the conference featured a panel session with four blockchain entrepreneurs in their 20s.

One of the panellists, Mr Larry Liu, was so intrigued by the technology that he left a career in artificial intelligence in Silicon Valley in the United States.

"Artificial intelligence seems to be almost the same every year, from machine learning to deep learning. When I saw the blockchain technology, as a programmer, I was instinctively excited. I felt that the code was very beautiful," he said.

The 28-year-old then founded his company Genaro in 2016 after reading a white paper on Bitcoin. The company addresses the issue of data storage in blockchain.

"Genaro, in a nutshell, is the only



From left: Moderator Cheryl Wang Yu from SUSS; Mr Yin Likun, chief executive officer of fintech company RootAnt; Mr Tang Lin, chief executive officer of blockchain company Ziggurat Tech; Mr Larry Liu, chief executive officer of blockchain company Genaro; and Mr Chris Shen, co-founder of blockchain community Mr Block.

company that combines a blockchain storage network into a programmable and efficient public chain, giving blockchain developers a one-stop development platform to deploy smart contracts and deploy data simultaneously," said Mr Liu, who is also the chief executive officer of Jiluo Tech, a blockchain technology solution company based in China.

Added service

Other panellists revealed how they are incorporating blockchain into existing businesses to provide more value to their offerings. Mr Lincoln Yin started his Shanghai-based business RootAnt when he was a 19-year-old undergraduate. The company provides exchanges with trading systems and platforms. Last year, the firm added blockchain

technology into their solutions.

Mr Yin said: "We have customers in more than 10 countries. When these overseas financial institutions want to enter China, they get into a serious bottleneck. We can help them to enter this market and apply our platform to other countries. The transparency of the registration and transaction process facilitated by blockchain enables more individual investors to participate in large-scale investment projects."

Young entrepreneurs are also finding more creative applications for blockchain. Mr Francis Tang, founder of Ziggurat Tech, another China-based company, is hoping to use technology to empower China's cultural industry.

Mr Tang said: "China is also talking about cultural self-confidence. I really think that we can transform China's traditional industry into a real Internet asset. I hope to be able to use my understanding of the blockchain and do something about this industry."

Preparing for the future

Capitalising on this trend, institutes of higher learning such as SUSS are incorporating topics related to blockchain

into their curriculum.

Associate professor Lee Pui Mun, dean of SUSS School of Business, says: "At SUSS, we are already predicting the rise of the digital economy and the subsequent changes it will bring. This is why we have integrated these new technologies into our community so that our students can have an interest in the new economy and be prepared for it."

"We also recognise that blockchain technology could potentially change or redefine many businesses. SUSS has been keeping up with the times and have updated many of our finance modules to include blockchain technology and cryptocurrency topics."

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

SUSS
SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES