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Blockchain-Enabled Secure and Transparent Scholarly Communication in Sustainable Digital Libraries: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital libraries has intensified concerns regarding security, transparency, and trust in scholarly communication. Blockchain technology has emerged as a promising solution to address these challenges by enabling decentralized, immutable, and verifiable information management. This study aims to systematically review and synthesize existing research on blockchain-enabled secure and transparent scholarly communication within the context of sustainable digital libraries. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Data were collected from three major academic databases, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library, resulting in a final set of 55 relevant articles published between 2015 and 2025. The review analyzes publication trends, research themes, technological approaches, and reported benefits and limitations of blockchain adoption in digital library ecosystems. The findings indicate that blockchain is predominantly applied to enhance data integrity, peer-review transparency, copyright management, and long-term preservation, while also supporting sustainability through reduced reliance on centralized infrastructures. However, challenges related to scalability, interoperability, energy consumption, and regulatory compliance remain significant barriers to implementation. This review provides a comprehensive overview of current research directions and identifies critical gaps for future studies, offering valuable insights for researchers, librarians, and policymakers seeking to develop secure and sustainable digital library systems.

Keywords: *blockchain technology; digital libraries; scholarly communication; sustainability.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid digital transformation of scholarly communication has fundamentally reshaped how academic knowledge is created, evaluated, disseminated, and preserved (Redij & Namdas, 2024). While digital platforms have expanded access to scientific outputs, they have simultaneously intensified long-standing challenges related to trust, transparency, data integrity, and governance within academic ecosystems (Alshahrani, 2025). Issues such as opaque peer-review processes, authorship disputes, data manipulation, and insecure management of academic records continue to undermine confidence in digital scholarly infrastructures (OBIORAH, Ndubuisi, & FNisafetyE, 2025). These challenges have become increasingly salient as higher education institutions and research communities rely more heavily on interconnected digital systems to manage publications, libraries, and academic data (Zibani, Rajkoomar, Naicker, & Marimuthu, 2026).

Recent advances in distributed ledger technologies, particularly blockchain, have attracted growing attention as a potential technological foundation for addressing these structural weaknesses (André, Margarida, Garcia, & Dante, 2021). Blockchain's core characteristics—decentralization, immutability, traceability, and cryptographic security—offer mechanisms for strengthening trust in digital environments without reliance on centralized authorities (Ahmed, 2025). In the academic context, blockchain has been explored for diverse applications, including secure academic data management (Green et al., 2025), transparent document control in library environments (Qardashov & Ahmedli, 2025), and tamper-resistant digital library systems that enhance both security and transparency (Evwiekpaefe et al., 2025).

Beyond infrastructure management, blockchain has also been proposed as a means to reform critical processes within scholarly communication itself. The integrity and sustainability of peer review, for example, have been questioned due to reviewer fatigue, lack of incentives, and limited transparency (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2023). Blockchain-based token systems have been empirically investigated as a way to incentivize reviewer participation while preserving accountability and traceability (Anderson et al., 2025). Similarly, decentralized frameworks leveraging blockchain and self-sovereign identity have been introduced to validate ethical authorship and reduce disputes in academic publishing (Al-Sabahi & Al-Mabsali, 2025). These developments indicate a shift from purely conceptual discussions toward applied, system-level solutions.

The relevance of blockchain extends further into the governance of academic credentials and research outputs (De Alwis, Shrestha, & Sarker, 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that blockchain-based verification systems can effectively enhance academic integrity by preventing credential fraud and ensuring the authenticity of academic records (Cardenas-Quispe & Pacheco, 2025). When combined with artificial intelligence, blockchain has also been shown to reduce corruption risks and improve verification efficiency in higher education systems (Razaque et al., 2025). Such findings underscore blockchain's potential role not only as a technical tool, but also as an institutional mechanism for strengthening trust across the academic lifecycle.

In parallel, digital libraries—long regarded as the backbone of scholarly communication—are undergoing significant transformation. Contemporary research highlights how blockchain can support next-generation library services by improving access control, rights management, and long-term preservation of digital resources (Emmanuel et al., 2023; Evwiekpaefe et al., 2025). The application of blockchain to digital cultural heritage further illustrates its capacity to safeguard the integrity and sustainability of digital knowledge assets over time (Liu et al., 2025). These developments align with broader efforts to design resilient and sustainable digital library ecosystems capable of supporting future scholarly needs.

Despite these promising advances, the adoption of blockchain within academic and library

environments remains fragmented. Studies report uneven implementation, varying levels of institutional readiness, and unresolved concerns related to scalability, interoperability, and sustainability (Koo et al., 2025). Moreover, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence has introduced new complexities into scholarly communication, raising questions about authorship, originality, and accountability in digital research practices (Dwivedi et al., 2023). These intersecting technological trends highlight the need for a comprehensive and systematic understanding of how blockchain is being conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated within scholarly communication and digital library systems.

Although previous studies have explored blockchain adoption in higher education, digital preservation, and academic management systems, comprehensive reviews specifically examining blockchain-enabled scholarly communication within sustainable digital library ecosystems remain limited. Existing literature reviews tend to focus primarily on technical implementation, bibliometric trends, or isolated institutional applications, with comparatively limited attention given to issues of transparency, trust, governance, and sustainability within scholarly communication processes. Therefore, this study offers a more integrated and interdisciplinary synthesis by examining blockchain applications across peer review systems, academic publishing, digital library infrastructures, and sustainable scholarly communication environments.

Accordingly, this study aims to synthesize existing research on blockchain-enabled secure and transparent scholarly communication within sustainable digital libraries. By systematically reviewing peer-reviewed literature indexed in major academic databases, this study seeks to identify dominant research themes, technological approaches, application domains, and persistent challenges. In doing so, it contributes a structured overview of current knowledge while highlighting critical gaps and future research directions for scholars, librarians, system designers, and policymakers engaged in the development of trustworthy and sustainable academic infrastructures.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to examine the role of blockchain and distributed ledger technologies in enhancing scholarly communication, academic publishing, peer review processes, and sustainable digital library infrastructures. The review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility throughout the study selection and synthesis process. The SLR approach was selected to enable a structured synthesis of empirical and conceptual research, identify dominant research themes, and reveal gaps in the application of blockchain technologies within scholarly communication ecosystems.

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this review consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved from three major international academic databases, Scopus, IEEE Xplore and ACM Digital Library. These databases were chosen due to their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in information systems, computer science, digital libraries, and scholarly communication. Together, they provide a reliable and interdisciplinary foundation for identifying high-quality studies relevant to the research scope.

Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was developed using Boolean operators to combine three core conceptual dimensions: blockchain technologies, scholarly communication contexts, and sustainability-related

digital infrastructures. The final search string applied across all databases was *("blockchain" OR "distributed ledger") AND ("scholarly communication" OR "academic publishing" OR "digital library" OR "peer review") AND ("sustainab" OR "SDG 9")**. The wildcard operator (*) was used to capture variations of sustainability-related terms. Searches were conducted within titles, abstracts, and keywords to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the screening and eligibility assessment stages.

a. Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met all of the following conditions:

1) Published between 2015 and 2025
2) Peer-reviewed journal articles
3) Written in English
4) Full-text accessible
5) Addressed blockchain or distributed ledger technologies
6) Examined contexts related to scholarly communication or academic publishing
7) Focused on digital libraries or peer review systems
8) Discussed aspects of sustainable digital libraries, sustainability, or digital library infrastructure.

b. Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they met any of the following conditions:

1) Published before 2015
2) Non-journal publications (e.g., conference papers, book chapters, reports, theses)
3) Written in languages other than English
4) Full text not accessible
5) Did not address blockchain or distributed ledger technologies
6) Did not meet the thematic scope related to scholarly communication, digital libraries, sustainability, or digital library infrastructure
7) Studies focusing solely on student-level applications without relevance to institutional or scholarly communication systems.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework, encompassing four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. An initial search across Scopus, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library identified 371 records. Prior to screening, 149 records were removed due to duplication, publication year outside the defined range, or incomplete bibliographic information. The remaining 222 records were screened based on titles and abstracts. During the screening stage, 133 records were excluded for failing to meet the inclusion criteria, including non-journal publications, review-type studies, student-focused research, and studies with purely technical blockchain scopes. Full-text eligibility assessment was then conducted, resulting in a final set of 55 studies retained for in-depth thematic synthesis. The complete study selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction was performed using a standardized extraction framework to ensure consistency across studies. Extracted data included publication year, country of origin, research focus, application domain, methodological approach, and key contributions. The selected studies were analyzed using qualitative

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thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and thematic clusters related to blockchain-enabled scholarly communication and sustainable digital library systems. The synthesis emphasized conceptual contributions, governance implications, and sustainability dimensions rather than quantitative meta-analysis.

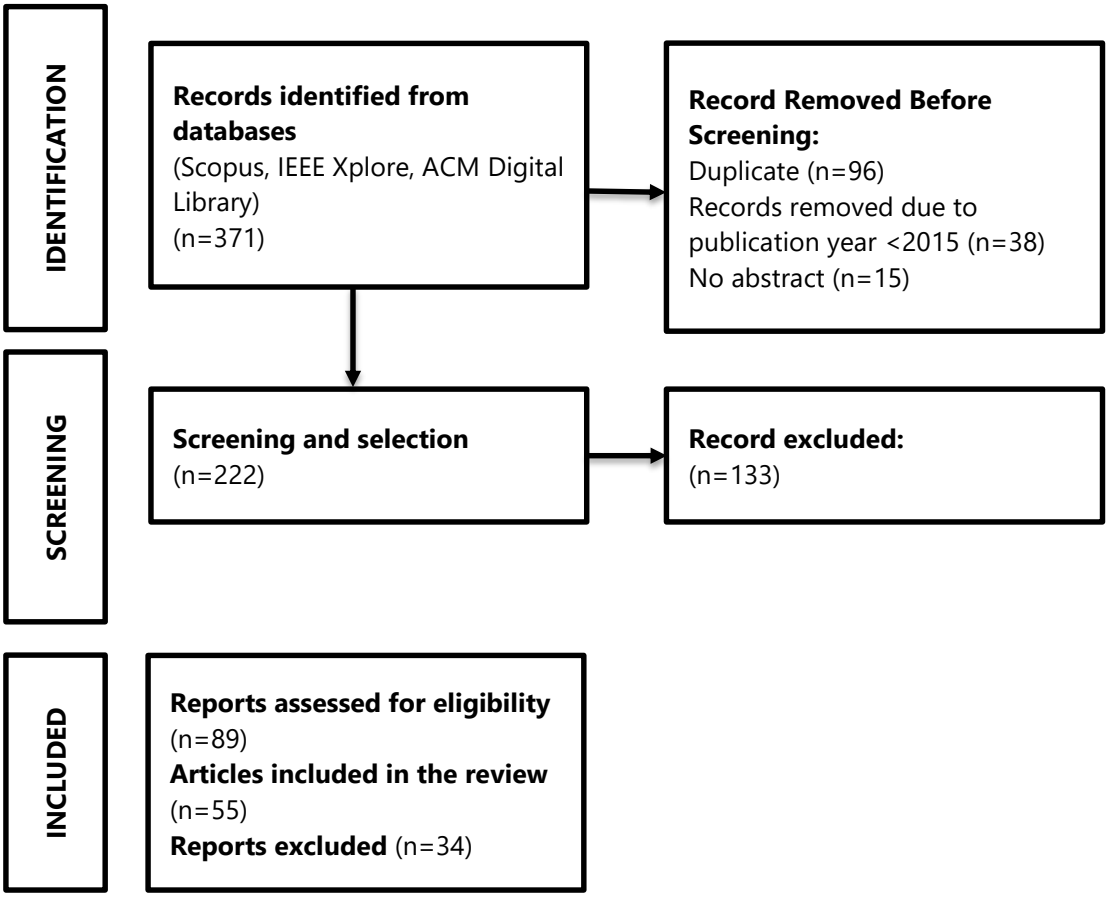

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the systematic literature review

Tablel 1. Characteristics of Included Studies (n=55)

Research Domain	Number of Studies	Percentage (%)
Blockchain and Distributed Ledger Technologies (DLT)	18	32.7%
Scholarly Communication	12	21.8%
Academic Publishing Systems	9	16.4%
Digital Library Infrastructure	10	18.2%
Peer Review Systems	6	10.9%
Total	**55**	**100%**

Table 2. Methodological Distribution of Included Studies (n=55)

Methodological Approach	Number of Studies	Percentage (%)
Conceptual or Framework-based	15	27.3%
Qualitative (interviews, policy analysis, case studies)	14	25.5%
Quantitative (survey, statistical, modelling)	11	20.0%
Mixed-method	9	16.4%

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Design Science or System Development	6	10.8%
Total	**55**	**100%**

Table 3. Country Distribution of Included Studies (n=55)

Region or Country	Number of Studies	Percentage (%)
Europe (UK, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, etc.)	17	30.9%
Asia (China, South Korea, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc.)	15	27.3%
Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, etc.)	8	14.5%
North America (USA & Canada)	7	12.7%
Middle East (Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, etc.)	5	9.1%
Latin America	3	5.5%
Total	**55**	**100%**

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 55 included studies across major research domains relevant to blockchain-enabled scholarly communication and sustainable digital libraries. The results indicate that blockchain and distributed ledger technologies constitute the largest research domain, accounting for nearly one-third of the studies. This dominance reflects the growing interest in leveraging decentralized technologies to enhance transparency, trust, and security within scholarly communication infrastructures. Studies focusing on scholarly communication and academic publishing systems also represent a substantial proportion, highlighting ongoing concerns related to publication ethics, governance, and digital transformation. Meanwhile, research on digital library infrastructure and peer review systems underscores the role of technological platforms in supporting sustainable and trustworthy knowledge dissemination.

Table 3 illustrates the geographical distribution of the included studies based on authors' institutional affiliations. European and Asian countries contribute the majority of publications, indicating strong regional engagement in research on digital scholarly infrastructures and blockchain technologies. African countries also show a notable presence, particularly in studies addressing sustainability, capacity building, and digital transformation in academic libraries. Contributions from North America, the Middle East, and Latin America further demonstrate the global relevance of blockchain-enabled scholarly communication, although research output remains unevenly distributed across regions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the PRISMA-guided selection process, a total of 55 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 were included in this systematic literature review. The selected studies represent diverse disciplinary perspectives, including library and information science, scholarly communication, computer science, and blockchain-related fields, highlighting the interdisciplinary scope of blockchain-enabled scholarly communication and sustainable digital libraries.

a. Distribution of Studies by Research Domain

The results indicate that the largest proportion of studies focus on blockchain and distributed ledger technologies, followed by research addressing scholarly communication and academic publishing systems. A considerable number of studies also examine digital library infrastructure, particularly in relation to data integrity, access control, and long-term preservation. In contrast, studies explicitly linking blockchain with sustainability-oriented digital libraries and peer review systems remain relatively limited.

b. Methodological Characteristic

The methodological analysis shows a dominance of conceptual and framework-based studies, reflecting the exploratory nature of blockchain adoption in scholarly communication. Qualitative approaches, including interviews, policy analysis, and case studies, provide insights into governance, ethical concerns, and institutional readiness. Quantitative and mixed-method studies, although fewer, contribute empirical evidence related to adoption intention, system performance, and user perceptions.

c. Geographical Distribution

Geographically, the included studies are primarily concentrated in Europe and Asia, followed by Africa and North America. African studies frequently emphasize digital capacity building, sustainability, and adoption readiness in academic libraries. Contributions from Latin America and the Middle East, while less numerous, address access, infrastructure, and equity issues within scholarly communication systems.

Discussion

a. Blockchain Adoption in Scholarly Communication and Digital Libraries

The results of this SLR indicate that blockchain is increasingly recognized as a promising technology for improving transparency, security, and trust within scholarly communication systems. However, the predominance of conceptual and design-oriented studies suggests that practical implementation in real-world academic and digital library environments remains limited. Existing empirical studies further reveal that blockchain adoption is significantly influenced by factors such as perceived usefulness, organizational readiness, and institutional policy support in academic libraries (Kim et al., 2025). In addition, applied studies in digital library settings demonstrate that the successful implementation of blockchain technologies depends not only on technological infrastructure, but also on staff competencies and the integration of educational and skill development objectives (Nooji & Bhat, 2025). These findings collectively suggest that although blockchain holds considerable potential for transforming scholarly communication, its effective adoption requires strong organizational capacity, strategic governance, and long-term institutional commitment.

b. Trust, Transparency, and User Acceptance

Trust emerges as a central theme across the reviewed studies, particularly in relation to peer review transparency, authorship verification, and academic record management. Blockchain's decentralized and immutable architecture is frequently associated with increased confidence in scholarly communication processes by enhancing data integrity, traceability, and accountability. However, the findings also suggest that technological features alone are insufficient to fully address trust-related challenges within academic ecosystems. Several studies indicate that governance mechanisms, ethical accountability, and privacy considerations remain important concerns in blockchain-based scholarly environments. Furthermore, empirical evidence demonstrates that user trust and psychological acceptance significantly influence behavioral intention to adopt blockchain-based systems (Prados-Castillo et al., 2025), reinforcing the importance of user-centered and ethically grounded implementation strategies. These findings imply that successful blockchain adoption in scholarly communication requires not only technological reliability, but also institutional trust, supportive governance frameworks, and human oversight

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mechanisms.

c. Implications for Sustainable Digital Libraries

From a sustainability perspective, the reviewed literature positions blockchain-enabled digital libraries as infrastructures capable of supporting long-term access, data integrity, and operational resilience, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Empirical studies in educational and library contexts further confirm that blockchain technologies can improve system reliability, accountability, and transparency when integrated with existing digital platforms (Ullah et al., 2021; Chukwusa et al., 2025). In addition, blockchain has the potential to strengthen digital preservation practices and support secure scholarly information management within sustainable academic ecosystems. Nevertheless, several challenges continue to hinder large-scale implementation, particularly issues related to scalability, energy consumption, interoperability, and technical complexity. These findings suggest that while blockchain offers promising opportunities for sustainable digital libraries, its long-term effectiveness depends on balanced technological development, institutional preparedness, and sustainable governance strategies.

d. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite increasing scholarly attention, several research gaps remain evident within the existing literature. First, there is still a limited number of longitudinal and experimental studies examining the real-world implementation and long-term impact of blockchain technologies in scholarly communication systems. Most existing studies remain conceptual or exploratory in nature, reducing the availability of empirical evidence regarding practical effectiveness and institutional outcomes. In addition, current empirical research is geographically uneven, with a concentration of studies in technologically advanced regions, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings across diverse academic and digital library contexts. Furthermore, relatively few studies adopt integrated socio-technical frameworks that simultaneously address technological, organizational, governance, and ethical dimensions of blockchain adoption. Future research should therefore prioritize large-scale empirical investigations, comparative cross-regional studies, and sustainable governance models to advance the development of blockchain-enabled scholarly communication and digital library ecosystems.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesizes current scholarly evidence on the role of blockchain and distributed ledger technologies in enhancing scholarly communication and sustainable digital library infrastructures. The findings indicate a strong consensus in the literature that blockchain has significant potential to improve transparency, security, trust, and data integrity across key scholarly communication processes, including peer review, academic publishing, and digital library management. However, despite this recognized potential, practical implementation remains limited, with the majority of existing studies adopting conceptual, exploratory, or design-oriented approaches.

Empirical studies reveal that blockchain adoption in academic and digital library contexts is shaped by a combination of technological, organizational, and institutional factors. Perceived usefulness, organizational readiness, availability of digital infrastructure, staff competencies, and supportive policy frameworks emerge as critical enablers of adoption. Conversely, barriers such as technical complexity, scalability concerns, regulatory uncertainty, and limited institutional capacity continue to constrain large-scale deployment. These challenges highlight the gap between

technological promise and operational reality within scholarly communication ecosystems.

From a sustainability perspective, the review suggests that blockchain can contribute to the development of resilient and sustainable digital library infrastructures aligned with SDG 9 by supporting secure information flows, improving governance mechanisms, and enabling long-term preservation and accessibility of scholarly outputs. Nevertheless, sustainability outcomes are unlikely to be achieved through technological adoption alone. Strategic integration with institutional policies, capacity-building initiatives, and cross-stakeholder collaboration is essential to ensure that blockchain-based solutions deliver meaningful and enduring value.

Future research should prioritize empirical, context-sensitive investigations that examine real-world implementations of blockchain in scholarly communication and digital libraries, particularly in diverse institutional and geographical settings. Longitudinal studies, mixed-method approaches, and comparative analyses across regions would be especially valuable in advancing understanding of adoption dynamics and sustainability impacts. Overall, this review underscores that blockchain represents a promising but still emerging pathway toward more transparent, trustworthy, and sustainable scholarly communication systems.

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