Abstract

Satoshi Nakamoto unleashed Bitcoin onto the world on the cusp of the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, the digital currency has grown in value and in its population of users. However, a decade earlier, in the late 1990s, a slew of digital currency experiments preceded Bitcoin. These currencies sought to monetize the newfangled Internet, as the entrepreneurs behind these projects predicted that the Internet would become a highly integrated part of the global economy. However, all of these digital currency experiments failed—few lasted into the new millennium. This thesis seeks to explore the history of Bitcoin and its predecessors, in search of an answer as to why early digital currencies failed while Bitcoin has been relatively successful thus far. This thesis will also attempt to fill a hole in the historiography of monetary evolution left by the scholars of the Jacksonian Bank War. Current historiography leaves out the role of the common person in determining the future of an economy’s currency; this thesis aims to fill that gap with its examination of digital currency. The research for this thesis will draw upon a wealth of primary sources consisting of archived websites, social media discussions, news articles, government documents, technical works regarding digital currency, and quantitative data pertaining to Bitcoin’s use and growth.