

# Management Udyama Digest



2024 | Volume IV

Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

## FROM HOMETOWN WASTE TO NATIONAL PRIDE





# FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES







# CONTENTS

## INSIDE

## Page No.

<b>From Hometown Waste to National Pride: A Sustainable Business Entrepreneur's Journey</b> <i>Innovation Through Challenges</i>	<b>02</b>
<b>Social Life Cycle Assessment In Shaping Socially Responsible Business Practices</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Connecting The Dots : Strategic Alignment In Supply Chain Management</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Why Corporate Leaders and Entrepreneurs Should Master Public Speaking?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Pakistan - Yet Another Unexplored Trade Destination</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Remaining Creativity: How AI Is Revolutionising the Advertising Industry</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Green is the New Gold: How Banks and Insurers Are Powering the Sustainability Revolution</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>AI and eLearning: Transforming Digital Business Performance</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Revolutionize the Sri Lankan Fashion Industry with Virtual Influencers</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Sabra Leos : Leading The Way For A Greener Future</b>	<b>59</b>



# Management Udyama Digest

## EDITORIAL BOARD

### Editor-in-Chief

Ms. Warunika N. Hettiarachchi

### Editorial Advisor

Prof. Athula Gnanapala  
Prof. M.S. Mohamed Aslam

### Co-Editors

Prof. Dewasiri N. Jayantha  
Prof. T. Ushan Peiris  
Dr. Sampath Wahala  
Dr. Nadee Mahawatta

### Editorial Assistant / Design

Mr. Dakshina Patabandi  
Ms. Dinali Samarawickrama

**Management**  
Udyama **Digest**

Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka  
Tel- +94 (0) 45 - 228007  
Email - editorial@udyama.mgt.sab.ac.lk  
www.sab.ac.lk/mgmt/managementdigest

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Welcome to Volume IV of Udyama: Management Digest, a flagship publication of the Faculty of Management Studies of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. As we navigate the ever-evolving business world with its shifting organizational dynamics, this issue invites you to explore how innovation, adaptability, and ethical leadership are reshaping the future of management, serving as your gateway to fresh perspectives in this evolving field.

This volume explores a diverse array of topics, blending academic rigour with real-world insights. Our contributors, a vibrant mix of academics, industry experts, and emerging voices, offer thought-provoking insights to navigate the complexities of modern work cultures. We believe effective management extends beyond theoretical frameworks; it demands fostering adaptability, embracing innovation, and cultivating a deep understanding of the human element within organizations. Whether you are a seasoned leader or an aspiring professional, these pages aim to spark reflection, inspire creativity, and furnish you with actionable knowledge to thrive.

Thus, we hope Volume IV challenges your thinking, fuels your curiosity, and leaves you with practical ideas to apply in your own work, both informative and inspiring.

Happy reading!

## OUR VISION

**To be the most  
innovative and eco-  
efficient centre of  
excellence in higher  
education and  
research in  
Management Studies  
in the South Asian  
Region**

## Motto

**Nurturing Paragons  
of Virtue**



## OUR MISSION

Becoming the leading innovative and sustainable centre of excellence in higher education and research in the region by:

- Producing competent management graduates possessing knowledge, skills, attitudes and mindset to contribute to sustainable development at the national and global level.
- Taking tangible measures to nurture and preserve nature through life-changing education in management and related disciplines.
- Generating new knowledge and disseminating it with global relevance through high-impact research publications.
- Providing innovative expert services to interested parties through the development of human capital.

## CORE VALUES

**Integrity:** Acting in an ethical, honest, and fair manner by serving all members of the society as a family.

**Collaboration and Synergy:** Encouraging collaborations, teamwork, and interaction across disciplines, industry, academia, and society.

**Quality Consciousness:** Affiliation and accreditation of faculty should be acknowledged by all the stakeholders as a sign of end-to-end quality human resource development and knowledge infrastructure.

**Respect:** Due respect is ensured to all internal and external stakeholders of the faculty.

**Inclusivity:** The faculty adapts an inclusive growth approach to serve women, youth and any other vulnerable group to prevent gender or any other discrimination.

**Accountability and Sustainability:** Ensuring academic excellence through the utilization of institutional resources responsibly with the consciousness of accountability for the public on environment, socio-culture and economy.

**Community:** The faculty associates and works together with all stakeholders and the public as one community to build a sustainable nation.

**Creativity and Innovation:** Forward-thinking, creativity, and continuous innovation in every means.





“ I would not say this company is mine, as I'll develop it and might let go as it grows and becomes a service to the world. Under that concept, I'm only developing and working for the company. I don't believe in the notion of 'the founder', because without all other stakeholders' efforts, the company won't survive. Thus, I engage as an employee rather than founder, especially as the company is a private limited. I do not like mentioning I'm the force, since, with or without me, thanks to staff and supportive parties, the company will flourish. Due to its strong model, operations run smoothly even without me, except for special decisions. The company will develop and our comforts increase, but this is solely based on everyone's efforts. ”



Mr. Dulanjana Vithanage  
Managing Director - Jack Fruit Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd.  
MSc in Entrepreneurship (USJ), BSc Marketing (USJ)



# FROM HOMETOWN WASTE TO NATIONAL PRIDE: **A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS ENTREPRENEUR'S JOURNEY**

*Innovation Through Challenges*





You started working in your business while still pursuing your degree. How did you get the initial idea, and how did you balance the work and study?

When I was doing my A/Ls, I saw a lot of jackfruits in my hometown (Wanduramba, Galle) dropping from trees and just going to waste, emitting a smell in the whole neighbourhood. I really hated that waste and went to the Agriculture department to find a solution, where they told me that if I could find a solution, they would provide their fullest support, which became a great motivation for me.

For my Advanced Level, I followed the biology stream for a little time, but when I saw the hectic life of doctors and realised that I was not built for that life, then I followed the Arts stream for a small period of time and switched to the Commerce stream, which I was able to follow for only 7-8 months. However, I was fortunate to enter the Management Faculty of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, and around this time, I had a strong thought that I wanted to start a business with these jackfruits. So, I sought advice from my lecturers, who advised me to do a small survey and get the findings.

Then, I consulted my university's Food Science and Technology department, and they allowed me to have a knowledge-sharing session. From the initial moment, I implemented all that I learned in my Marketing degree to my business, that practical knowledge was my key to academic success. I also followed six different courses, including Entrepreneurship and Psychology, while doing my basic degree and got selected for an Entrepreneurship Master's as well, when I was in the final year of my Bachelor's degree. I did my assignments, final research, presentation and now even my master's research based on my business, so balancing work and study wasn't a big challenge.



How did your diverse academic background and university experiences influence your entrepreneurial journey?

As a management student, I decided to study science, which I believe is the first time someone in Sri Lanka has done this and won the Best Science Award in 2019 at my university. This achievement wouldn't have been possible without the support of my lecturers, who helped me learn across many areas.



*JackFruit Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd, established in 2017, is a Sri Lankan company specializing in innovative jackfruit-based food products, such as Jackfruit Noodles and dehydrated fruits and vegetables, by seamlessly blending traditional production methods with modern technology. Renowned for its commitment to quality, nutrition, and sustainability, the company complies with global standards like ISO 22000, GMP, and HACCP. Currently exporting to 06 different countries, Jackfruit Ceylon continues to strive for further advancements and growth. Mr. Dulanjana Vithanage is the Managing Director and the Founder of Jackfruit Ceylon Ltd.*



When I took my Advanced Level exams, I joined the commerce stream just seven months before the exams. Even though I was new to this stream, I worked hard and achieved top results. There were many smart students around me, but I was able to secure an island rank and get into the University of Sri Jayawardenepura. Some school teachers questioned my decision to switch A/L streams, since I had studied science, arts, and commerce. But looking back, I now see how valuable this mix of knowledge has been for my business. I've made mistakes along the way, but those mistakes have taught me important lessons.

I also participated in many extracurricular activities at university and held leadership roles in several committees. One of the most memorable experiences was preparing alms food for people observing Sil at the Mahamewnawa Temple. This experience sparked my interest in cooking and food science, and later, it helped me when I started my food business. At first, I didn't plan on starting a business, but the knowledge I gained in food science became a considerable advantage.

Starting my own business taught me how important every decision is. Even small mistakes can sometimes affect the whole business. Now, I lead a company that works with 400+ suppliers. We export our products to countries like Qatar, Dubai, Bahrain, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, and we also sell locally.

Looking back, I encourage all students to take full advantage of university life. Participate in activities, learn new things, and develop the skills you need to make good decisions. These experiences will help you grow and succeed in your future career, just like they did for me.





What was the biggest challenge you faced while developing your business?

The journey of developing JackFruit Ceylon has been filled with challenges, but I would not pinpoint one single challenge as the “biggest.” Instead, the challenges have evolved over time, with each growth stage presenting its unique hurdles.

In the early stages, one of the most significant challenges I faced was the reaction of my family. With a strong academic background and multiple qualifications, my family initially questioned why I chose to pursue entrepreneurship rather than a traditional, stable career. I calmly explained my vision to them and chose to let my work speak for itself. Over time, they saw the progress and understood my commitment to building something meaningful, which ultimately helped me overcome this challenge.

On the financial side, managing and reinvesting every rupee wisely has been crucial. From the outset, I made a conscious decision to be diligent about every financial decision, ensuring that I reinvested profits into the business for continual improvement. I adopted a mindset where I aimed to make at least one improvement to the business every day.

I have relied heavily on partnerships with universities like the University of Colombo and Wayamba University, leveraging their research and expertise to enhance our products and operations. Many students from these institutions have also contributed to our research and development; some even later partnered with us in the business. These academic collaborations have been instrumental in overcoming technical challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unexpected challenge, but it also became an opportunity for us to innovate. We focused on creating new products, such as jackfruit-based noodles and bites, to address the growing demand for healthy and nutritious food. This research and product development allowed us to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic and provide solutions to help people maintain their health.

The economic crisis also presented its own set of challenges, particularly the rising cost of oil. In response, we researched energy alternatives and developed technologies to extract heat from the roof of our factory to reduce costs. These innovative solutions allowed us to maintain production while mitigating the financial impact of the crisis.

Further, since many Sri Lankan scholars are pursuing advanced degrees abroad, it allowed us to form connections with international universities and leverage their expertise.







Did you receive any support from the government when you started up your business?

We haven't received any financial support, but we got the support to identify our target market, find better technology, and gain knowledge. However, under the "Graduated Entrepreneur", I received a grant to scale up my business.

If the projects are feasible and effective, we discuss with the government in position and continue our work. We provide plans to develop the operations of our people at a lower cost to the government. We have even provided feasible plans to restructure the municipal councils of our areas. For example,



we have introduced a method to solve entrepreneurs' problems within a single meeting with the participation of 17 officers from different ministries. It makes the procedures so much easier. The government also prefers methods which make the office work efficiently. So, we make a positive impact on the government structure as well.



What led you to the Best National Industry Brand? Did you have an ambition to win an award like that while pursuing your dream?

We make a vision statement and update it annually. There is a 7-8 page summary of what we want to achieve within the year, and we work accordingly, resulting in a smooth flow. We got the award for the brand which added the best value to agriculture, and this award was a good symbol for us to reaffirm that we are on the right path. Moreover, the evaluation process gives us an idea of what we should further develop and what our current weaknesses are, which is very beneficial to us. We did not intentionally have an ambition to win an award, but implementing strategies to overcome weaknesses led us to win this award. For our big dream, these awards are little milestones for enjoying our path to success.







What are your future plans for the JackFruit Ceylon business?

At JackFruit Ceylon, our vision statement for the next 5 to 10 years revolves around continuous innovation, sustainability, and addressing global nutritional needs through our products. As we gain more knowledge and experience, we plan to update our future plans regularly.

One key area of focus is identifying gaps in the market and developing food items that cater to these needs. For instance, dietary fibre is a scarce resource in the global food market, and we are investing in research to produce highly nutritious meals using modern technologies that address this issue. We aim to offer products that are free from artificial additives, promoting natural and healthful food that can be customised to meet the specific needs of our customers.

Another example of innovation in response to market demand is the introduction of protein-enriched noodles. While no other company in Sri Lanka has ventured into this space, we identified the increasing need for protein-rich products and created a nutritious alternative using jack fruit. Our goal is to continue pushing the boundaries of food innovation and commercialisation, establishing JackFruit Ceylon as the world's leading brand for sustainable and nutritious food products.

In addition to our product development goals, we have a broader vision for our village, a 3000-acre area, which we aim to transform into a sustainable tourism village within the next 5 years. By combining eco-sustainable tourism with Agri-tourism and experience tourism, we plan to create a tourism hub that will benefit our local community and contribute to the overall development of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

We are committed to becoming a leading global exporter of our products. In the long term, our objective is to build JackFruit Ceylon into one of the most recognised companies in the world, known for its innovation, sustainability, and contribution to global food security.





# Jack Fruit Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd



When we conducted background research on you for this interview, we noticed that you never mentioned yourself as the 'Founder' of JackFruit Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd; instead, you mentioned yourself as the 'Manager'. Why?

Yes, of course. Though I initiated the idea of JackFruit Ceylon (Pvt.) Ltd, there are so many people who are developing this idea, including the university, the government, and my staff, who go above and beyond the salary they get paid to make this company their own. Therefore, I wouldn't even be able to attend an interview like this without their effort. Because of their extraordinary commitment, I get time to talk and inspire younger generations like you. Therefore, I believe that all of them are founders of the company. I would not say this company is mine because I'll develop this company and might let go of it as the company grows and becomes a service to the world. As such, under that concept, I'm only developing this company and working for it. So, I don't believe in the notion of 'the founder', because, without the effort of all other stakeholders, this company won't survive. Thus, I'm also engaging as an employee of the organisation rather than the founder, as the company also goes as a private limited. I do not like mentioning that I'm the force behind this company because without my staff and other supportive parties' blessings, with or without me, the company will flourish. After all, even now,

due to its strong model, the operations run smoothly even without me. Except for decision-making on special instances, the operations won't stop even if I'm not there. The company will develop, and the comforts of mine and my employees get will increase; so, this is solely based on everyone's efforts.



Do you have any advice or suggestions for young entrepreneurs like you who want to succeed with their entrepreneurial ideas?

The world is running in a knowledge-based society now, so having a proper education is critical, and the easiest way to gain that knowledge and skills is through the university education. Apart from that AI and other technologies can help us gain good knowledge as well. Through entrepreneurship or a traditional job, we can identify the best opportunities that suit us properly; only a knowledgeable person can properly identify these opportunities. Wisdom and knowledge come through all the extra activities we follow in the university education system. Therefore, as youngsters, we have so many opportunities, especially in a country like Sri Lanka, because we have many resources here that we still haven't been able to utilise fully. Because, we don't have enough knowledge given to us by the university education system. However, we



put that knowledge into waste by not following a path we are passionate about. So we should take advantage of the available resources and constantly research the gaps available in the world- for instance, when you are going for a job, you have to analyse your strengths and capabilities while seeing whether they match the job and which gap you could satisfy. So, following professional qualifications along with your bachelor's degree is very important. This will help you find your rhythm to success because if you are aspiring to be an entrepreneur, there are so many government institutions willing to help you, like NEDA, which provides grants and the various resources provided by the Divisional Secretariat office of your area. By contributing to our island, you can become a good citizen of the country as well.



You are a guest lecturer at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura and the University of Ruhuna. What made you go on that career path?

As an alumnus of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, where I completed my undergraduate, master's, and postgraduate studies, I feel deeply indebted to the institution that provided me with a wealth of knowledge and opportunities. I was fortunate to benefit from numerous courses, some offered at no cost even, which allowed me to expand my academic and professional expertise.

Because of the significant role my university played in shaping my career, I choose to give back by serving as a guest lecturer. My motivation is not financial; I do not charge for my lectures. Instead, it is driven by a sense of gratitude and a desire to contribute to the success of the university that helped me get to where I am today. Sharing my knowledge and experiences with students after a regular workday is stress-free.

In addition to my work at Sri Jayawardenapura, I also serve as a guest lecturer at the University of Ruhuna. This university is located in my home province, and I feel a strong connection to it. Giving back to my community by engaging with students in my province is a way to further contribute to the development of education in the region.





How did you suddenly get the idea of a sustainable tourism village?

It was a dream I had for a long time. I'm doing my PhD on Spiritual Entrepreneurship. I connected that knowledge with the concept of a sustainable tourism village. We examined the resources in our village and identified that the number of resources we have utilised is 15%, while the remaining 85% stays unoccupied. Sustainable tourism is the best way to utilise that 85% of resources. Since Galle is a tourist destination itself, it's a better place to give excitement to our tourists. We are planning to build many more small businesses within 5 years. We have initiated this idea with the help of the municipal council and the government as well. This concept has become a bigger idea with time due to the involvement of other stakeholders. It was not built in an instant. The results of this concept can be seen within the next 5-6 years.

Interview  
conducted by:

**Ms. Warunika Hettiarachchi,**  
Lecturer, Department of  
Marketing Management

Assistant and  
translation by:

**SMDSN Jayatilleke**  
**DMHW Dasanayake**  
**KDC Kaveesha**

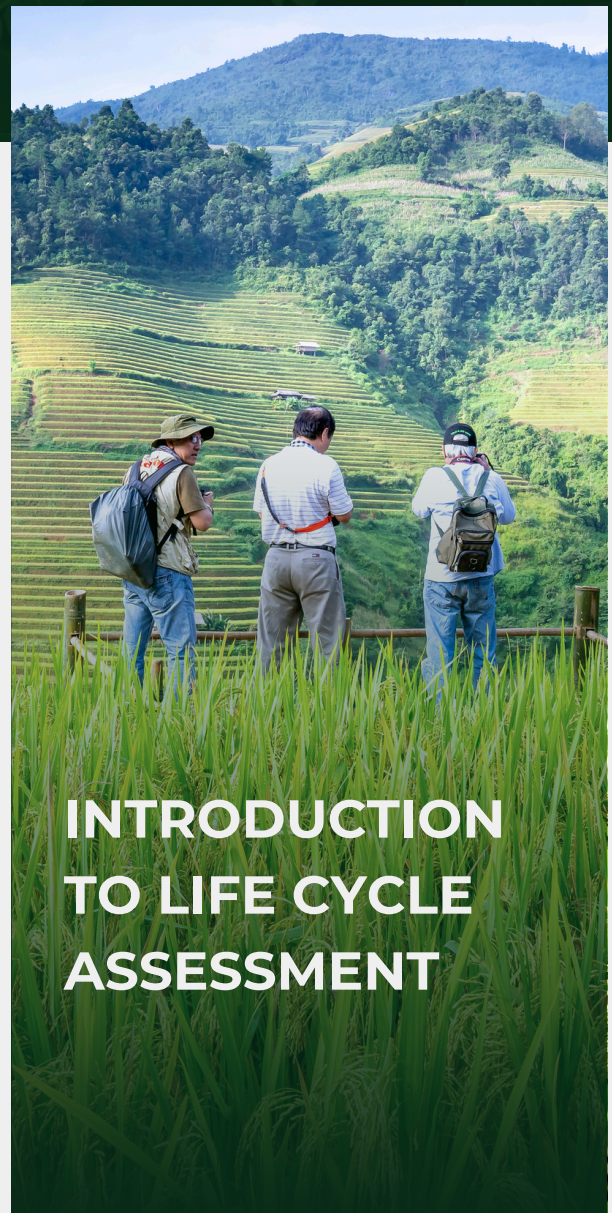
Undergraduates, Department of  
Marketing Management



# SOCIAL LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT IN SHAPING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

In an era where global demographics are rapidly shifting, consumption and production patterns threaten sustainable development. With a projected global population of 9.8 billion by 2050, the environmental, societal, and economic challenges we face today are set to escalate, making it more crucial than ever to evaluate our impact on the planet. How we produce and consume goods and services today will define our future and determine how well we have balanced economic growth with preserving natural and ecological systems.

Given these pressing concerns, the need for rigorous assessment and monitoring of our progress toward sustainable development is undeniable. Various concepts, methodologies, and tools have been developed to measure this progress, each varying in scope and application. Among these, the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) has emerged as a critical tool in the sustainability field. LCA's comprehensiveness and robustness have made it a preferred methodology for practitioners aiming to assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts of products and services throughout their life cycles.



## INTRODUCTION TO LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT



# EVOLUTION OF LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT

Initially, LCA focused primarily on environmental impacts, leading to the development of the Environmental Life Cycle Assessment (E-LCA). This methodology has matured and is now widely used to evaluate the environmental footprint of products and services across various industries. However, as the understanding of sustainability deepened, it became clear that environmental considerations alone were insufficient to capture the full spectrum of impacts. This realization gave rise to Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA) and Life Cycle Costing (LCC), which, together with E-LCA, form the integrated Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA).



While E-LCA is well-established, S-LCA and LCC are still under active development by researchers. The integration of these three frameworks into a comprehensive LCSA is a promising but as yet partially realized tool. LCSA aims to provide a holistic assessment of the sustainability of products and services, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions.







# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT

S-LCA focuses on the positive and negative social and socio-economic impacts of products or services over their life cycles, considering the entire value chain from a broad perspective. Like the generic LCA methodology, S-LCA is iterative, allowing continuous improvement through multiple assessment loops, from initial, generic results to more specific, case-based analyses. Since the introduction of the 'UNEP/SETAC Guidelines for Social Life Cycle Assessment of Products in 2009, S-LCA has evolved significantly, culminating in the latest version of the guidelines released in 2020. This methodology has clear connections with 14 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address social impacts.





Notably, in Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA), a "Social Handprint" represents the positive social contributions that a product, service, or organization makes throughout its lifecycle. While LCA traditionally focuses on identifying social risks and negative impacts, the concept of a social handprint shifts the perspective to include the extraordinary positive changes that can be generated in the areas of improved working conditions, community development, fair wages, and contributions to societal well-being. By measuring and expanding their social handprints, organizations can demonstrate proactive steps toward social sustainability, complementing the efforts to reduce their social footprints or negative impacts.



# GUIDING FRAMEWORKS OF S-LCA

UNEP/ SETAC “Guidelines for Social Life Cycle Assessment of Products and Organizations 2020” is the principal guiding framework for conducting S-LCA. Additional guidance can be obtained from the “Methodological Sheets for Subcategories in Social Life Cycle Assessment” published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2021 and “Pilot Projects on Guidelines for Social Life Cycle Assessment of Products and Organizations” published by Life Cycle Initiative and Social Life Cycle Alliance in 2022. Further, the Handbook for Product Social Impact Assessment (2020) and companion publications of the handbook, Social Topics Report (2022), Methodology Report - Product Social Impact Assessment (2020), Product Social Metrics Implementation Guide (2019) published by PRe Sustainability B.V. and the members of the Roundtable for Product Social Metrics stands as supplementary guidance documents for conducting S-LCA.

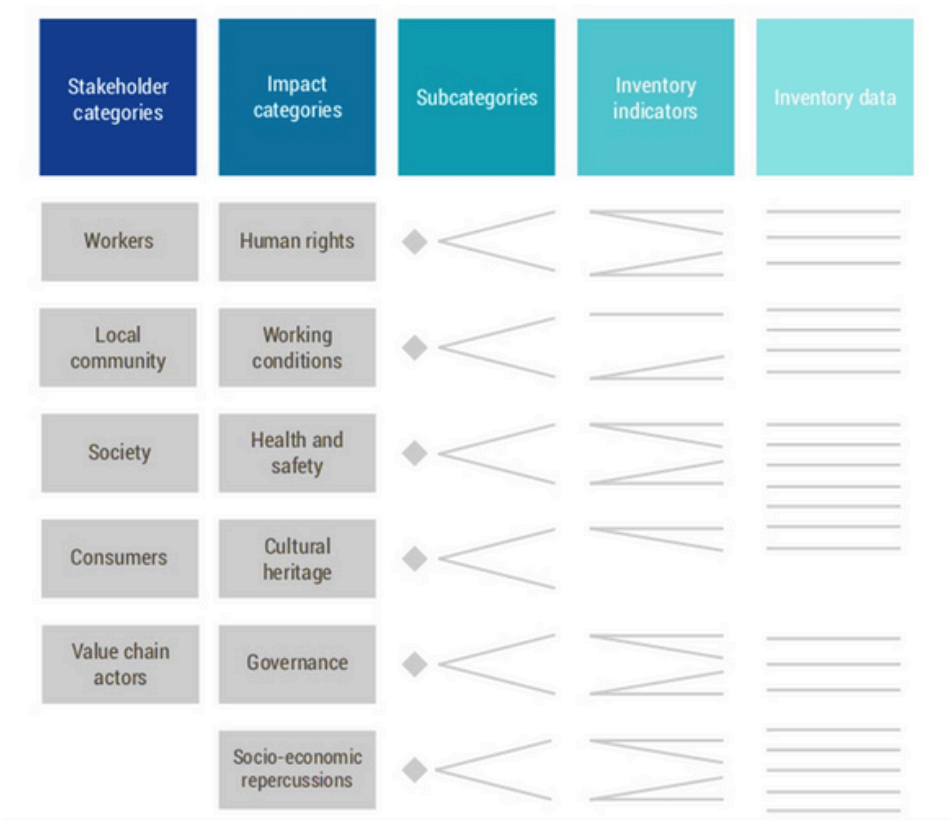


*Source: UN Environment Programme Life Cycle Initiative (2022)*

# STAKEHOLDER CATEGORIES, IMPACT CATEGORIES AND IMPACT SUBCATEGORIES

As per the principal guidelines provided by the UNEP/ SETAC, S-LCA incorporates a stakeholder approach to assessing potential social impacts along the value chain of a product or organization and covers both positive and negative impacts. The stakeholder approach covers Six (6) stakeholder categories which need to be considered for the assessment, namely: Local Community, Value Chain Actors, Consumer, Worker, Society and Children. Linked to the stakeholder categories are the impact subcategories that comprise socially significant themes or attributes. These subcategories are assessed by using impact indicators, of which inventory indicators link directly with the inventory of the product life cycle

Assessment system from categories to inventory data



Source: Adapted from Benoît et al. (2007)

Note : Connections are exemplary and not exhaustive



# METHODOLOGIES OF S-LCA

There are two main families of impact assessment approaches in S-LCA. The Reference Scale Approach, also known as Type I or Reference Scale S-LCIA, and the Impact Pathway Approach, also known as Type II or Impact Pathway S-LCIA, each respond to different practitioner aims. If the aim of the study is to describe a product system with a focus on its social performance or social risk, the use of the Reference Scale Approach is recommended. If the aim is to predict the consequences of the product system, with an emphasis on characterizing potential social impacts, the Impact Pathway Approach is recommended.

## ADDING VALUE THROUGH S-LCA

Integrating S-LCA into organizational contexts provides substantial value to stakeholders. Firstly, S-LCA offers a consistent view of social hotspots along the life cycle or value chain, ensuring that these critical areas are addressed rather than overlooked. When performed alongside E-LCA, S-LCA helps to identify the intersections between social and environmental issues, leading to a more aligned and comprehensive approach to sustainability. The results of S-LCA can also guide stakeholder surveys, adding depth to sustainability reports and enhancing overall transparency.

## BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA) is rapidly emerging as a critical area of interest not only among industry practitioners but also within academia. Our latest curriculum at the Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, comprises several related subjects that provide a solid foundation for understanding and applying S-LCA. Courses such as Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Human Resources Management, Industrial Relations and Employment Law, Business Compliances and Social Responsibility, and Human Ecology and Sustainable Development are deeply connected to the principles and practices of S-LCA and LCSA. These subjects equip students with the knowledge and ethical framework necessary to understand the broader implications of business decisions on society and the environment. By highlighting S-LCA related concepts during the delivery of these courses, we may ensure that students are not only theoretically proficient but also practically prepared to address real-world sustainability challenges.

# ENHANCING INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA SYNERGY

As part of our commitment to advancing industry academia collaboration and sustainability education, the Faculty of Management Studies, through its BizConnect initiative, has begun collaborating with industry partners to conduct Social Life Cycle Assessments (S-LCA) apart from the other environmental impact assessments. In 2023, we embarked on our first S-LCA project, conducting a Social Organizational LCA (SO-LCA) for a reputed private sector organization partnering with the Climate & Conservation Consortium. Completed in 2024, this project marked a significant milestone in advancing our competencies in conducting S-LCA and enhancing the collaboration between academia and industry. Such collaborations offer immense benefits to both academia and industry. For academia, these partnerships provide valuable opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, allowing faculty and students to engage directly with industry challenges. This hands-on experience not only deepens our understanding of S-LCA methodologies as academics but also enriches our teaching by exposing us to the complexities of sustainability issues faced by businesses today.

For the industry, collaboration with academic institutions brings fresh perspectives and cutting-edge research into their operations. By working with academia, companies can access the latest advancements in S-LCA methodologies and apply them to improve their sustainability practices. Additionally, these partnerships contribute to the continuous development of S-LCA and LCSA frameworks, as insights gained from industry projects feed back into academic research, refining and advancing the methodology.

In conclusion, as we move towards a future where sustainable development is paramount, the integration of LCA into both academic curricula and industry practices will be crucial. Through subject integration and collaboration, we can bridge the gap between theory and practice, advancing our collective understanding of sustainability and making meaningful contributions to a more sustainable world.

*For more information on Social Life Cycle Assessment visit -*

*<https://www.lifecycleinitiative.org/category/s-lca/>  
Reach out to us if you are interested in assessing the Social Life Cycle impact of your organization...*

**"As sustainability evolved, it became clear that true impact of business lies not just in reducing environmental harm but also in understanding the social and socio-economic effects"**



# AUTHOR DETAILS



**Ms. Asanka Waruni Thiranagama**  
MSc & BSc  
Senior lecturer (Gr. II)  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



**Dr. Wahala Mudiyanseelage Palitha Sampath**  
**Bandara Wahala**  
PhD, MSc, BSc.  
Senior lecturer (Gr. I)  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



**Mr. Ranathunga Arachchillage Danushka**  
**Chandimal Ranathunga**  
MSc & BSc  
Senior lecturer (Gr. II)  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



**Ms. Ishara Madurangi Katuwandeniya**  
MSc & BSc  
Senior lecturer (Gr. II)  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

# CONNECTING THE DOTS:

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT



In today's fast-paced business world, even the smallest misalignments can lead to significant inefficiencies and customer dissatisfaction. Recently, while waiting at a fast-food restaurant, I witnessed a scenario perfectly illustrating this point.

**Customer** – I need two mixed fried rice. (The customer appears to be in a hurry.)

**Cashier** – ok, sir.

The customer gives his debit card, and the cashier punches the card. The customer happily goes to the waiting area and sits. 10 minutes gone, and the customer comes to the counter and asks about the status of the order.

**Cashier** – sir, it will take 25 minutes.

**Customer** – now already 10 minutes gone. Why do you all need another 25 minutes? Your menu says within 15 minutes.

**Cashier** – sorry, sir, today we are a little busy with orders; we also have deliveries as well. And we need preparation time.

**Customer** – why do you put it on your menu, tell customers, and commit for 15 minutes? I would have easily taken my food from the next restaurant and left by now.

The summary of the above discussion is that the commitments of the team that generates the demand (sales and marketing) are not aligned with those of the team that fulfills the demand (supply chain). This misalignment has led to an unsatisfactory customer experience.

Unarguably, we are working in a rapidly evolving business landscape, and strategic alignment has become more crucial than ever. This strategic alignment itself has created a competitive advantage for some companies. Companies that align their supply chain strategies with their other key strategies can achieve remarkable efficiencies, reduce costs, and maintain a competitive edge. This article explores the importance of strategic alignment in supply chain management, focusing on the interplay between competitive strategy, new product development strategy, sales and marketing strategy, and most importantly, the supply chain strategy.



# UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Any business should have a competitive strategy; in other words, what is the unique value the company brings to its customers compared to its competitors? Strategic alignment refers to the process of ensuring that all aspects of the business, including its supply chain and operations, work in harmony, supporting its competitive strategy. Each functional strategy must support other functional strategies here. Also, it is important that different functions of the organization must appropriately structure their processes and resources to execute this strategy.

It is also important that the design of the overall supply chain and the role of each stage is aligned to support the supply chain strategy of the company. When business units and functions are aligned, they contribute to a cohesive strategy that drives overall business success.

The benefits of strategic alignment are numerous: it improves customer satisfaction, reduces the cost of operations, enhances operational efficiency, optimizes resource allocation, and fosters innovation. On the other hand, misalignment can lead to inefficiencies, increased costs, missed market opportunities, and a weakened competitive position. Therefore, it is important that companies should thoroughly focus on their strategic alignment.



# THE ROLE OF COMPETITIVE STRATEGY IN SUPPLY CHAIN ALIGNMENT

Competitive strategy defines how a company positions itself in the marketplace to gain a competitive advantage. It will explain how you are different from your competitors. What unique value can you bring to your customer compared to your competitor? It can be either in terms of price, lead time, safety, quality, taste, or any other product feature. Think of an apparel company that commits to 'a speed to market' model. They are leading the market because they are faster than anyone in the market. They can go to the market before anybody enters. This itself might create a competitive advantage for this company. Whether a company adopts a cost leadership, differentiation, or focus strategy, aligning the supply chain with this strategy is vital. For instance, a company pursuing a cost leadership strategy needs a supply chain prioritizing cost efficiency. They might use bulk ordering, low-cost warehousing options, and low-cost transport modes like sea aligned to the cost leadership. While a differentiation strategy requires a supply chain that supports flexibility and innovation. They might work with highly responsive and flexible but comparatively higher-cost suppliers, flexible transport providers and warehouses.

Consider a global retail giant like Walmart, which has built its competitive strategy around cost leadership. Walmart's supply chain is carefully aligned with this strategy, focusing on minimizing costs through efficient logistics, bulk purchasing, and strong supplier relationships. This alignment enables Walmart to offer low prices consistently, reinforcing its competitive position and winning the marketplace.

Similarly, Zara's (a giant in the global apparel industry) competitive strategy of delivering fast fashion is supported by a highly agile supply chain that enables it to respond rapidly to changing consumer preferences. By closely aligning its supply chain with its competitive strategy, Zara can bring new designs to the market faster than its competitors, thereby maintaining a strong market position.







# HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THE STRATEGIC FIT?

It is also important to know what a company needs to do to achieve this alignment. We know a competitive strategy will define and specify one or more customer segments they hope to satisfy. To achieve the alignment, the company must ensure that its supply chain capabilities, facilities, policies and procedures, and supply chain design support the supply chain's ability to satisfy the target customer segment.





# STEP 1 – UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER AND SUPPLY CHAIN UNCERTAINTY

The first step in this process is to understand the customer requirement for each customer segment and the uncertainty of each parameter. This is very important as it will reveal the extremes of unpredictability of demand and supply, which the supply chain needs to be ready for. If the company has no idea as to the extent to which the supply and demand will vary, two things can happen. If you overestimate the variation, this will create over-preparedness, creating excess and idling resources, bringing more and more inefficiencies to the supply chain. On the other hand, underestimating the variation will create more unsatisfied customers, and you won't be able to deliver what is promised. In the above example, the restaurant owner has no idea how the demand for products can vary during peak hours.





Once the company understands the uncertainty levels, the obvious next question is how the supply chain best meets this demand in this uncertain environment. Creating supply chain capabilities involves designing the supply chain responsiveness level aligned with the uncertainty level it can show. Here, we can understand the supply chain capability with the help of two axes. One is responsiveness, whereas the second is efficiency.

## STEP 2 – UNDERSTAND THE SUPPLY CHAIN CAPABILITIES

Responsiveness of the supply chain will help the supply chain do the following:

- Handle a large variety of products.
- Able to supply a wide range of quantities demanded.
- Meet shorter lead times.
- Develop highly innovative products.
- Meet higher service levels.

However, responsiveness always comes at a cost. For example, if you need to supply a wide range of quantities demanded, as mentioned above, you might need to maintain higher inventory levels and higher open capacity at any given time. When you work with shorter lead times, you will need to use high-cost modes like airfreight in your supply chain design.

Supply chain efficiency is the inverse of the cost of making and delivering a product to the customer. The lower the cost, the more efficient the supply chain is. Therefore, it is important to understand that for every strategic choice a company makes to increase the responsiveness of its supply chain, there are additional costs that will lower efficiency.

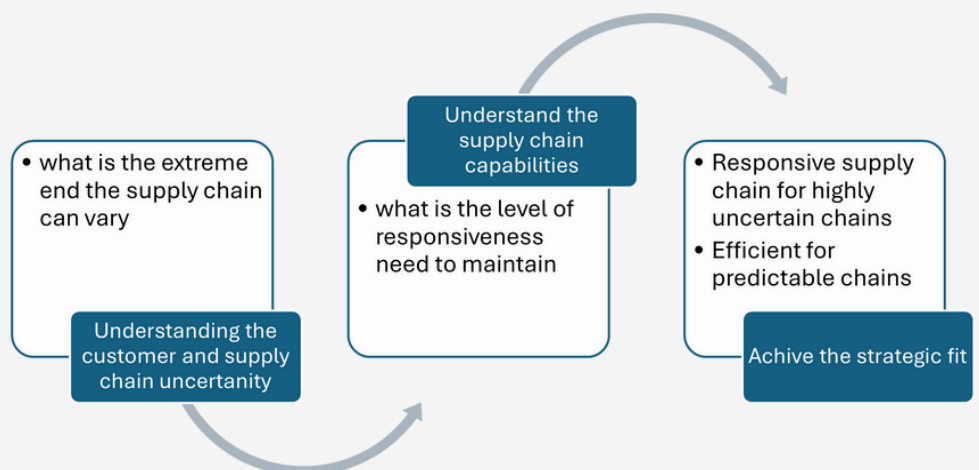
Think of consumer products like soap and biscuits. They have a predictable demand and supply, which needs an efficient supply chain design. A product like a new mobile phone has a highly uncertain and unpredictable demand and supply, which should be backed by a responsive supply chain.



# STEP 3 – ACHIEVING STRATEGIC FIT

Once the company maps the level of unpredictability in supply and demand, together with the supply chain position in responsiveness, the next step is to match the level of responsiveness and the uncertainty of the supply chain. Therefore, the target of this is to increase the element of responsiveness of the supply chain for highly uncertain products and bring more efficiency for low uncertain to predictable products.

## *Steps in achieving strategic fit*





# CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING STRATEGIC FIT

It is also vital to discuss the challenges in achieving the strategic fit.

## **1.Increasing uncertainty**

We all call this a VUCA world. The world is full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, and the same is true for businesses. Due to various factors such as pandemics, political instability, geopolitical changes, increased exchange rates, global supply demand shifts, global manufacturing hub shifts, crude oil price changes, etc., the future is more uncertain than ever.

## **2.Sustainable and ethical considerations**

Increasing demand for sustainable and ethically sourced products requires uniquely designed supply chains. However, balancing cost efficiency with sustainable methods is challenging when trying to maintain a competitive edge in pricing.

## **3.Increasing product variety and shrinking product life cycles**

When the product variety increases, having shorter life cycles reduces the supply chain's ability to strategically fit. Increasing product varieties requires managing many SKUs, which will complex the sourcing, inventory management and planning. When the product life cycle is reduced, the supply chain needs to be more agile. They need to accelerate product development, trials, commercial production and distribution. Maintaining the above and managing the cost will be challenging for an organization.

## **Tharaka Lakmal Rupasinghe**

**Academic and professional qualifications**

**BSc in Transport and Logistics Management,**

**Department of Transport and Logistics**

**Management, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa**

**CSCM (Certified Supply Chain Manager) awarded by ISCEA (International Supply Chain Education Alliance)**

**MILT (Member of Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport)**

**Designation – Senior Manager Supply Chain**

**Affiliation/ company – Lina Manufacturing (Pvt) Ltd**







# WHY CORPORATE LEADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS SHOULD MASTER PUBLIC SPEAKING?

They say leadership is all about communication crafting compelling messages, engaging teams, and persuading stakeholders to act. Do you agree with this? Well... while business strategies, digital tools, and data-driven decision-making are crucial, one skill stands above the rest in its ability to amplify a leader's impact: and that is PUBLIC SPEAKING.

So, why is public speaking an essential skill for corporate leaders and entrepreneurs? The answer lies in its power to enhance credibility, inspire teams, attract investors, and ultimately drive business success. Whether addressing a boardroom, pitching to investors, or speaking at an industry event, the ability to communicate with confidence and clarity is a game-changer.



# HERE'S WHY EVERY CORPORATE LEADER AND ENTREPRENEUR SHOULD INVEST IN POLISHING UP THEIR PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS:

## ENHANCES CREDIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

Leadership isn't just about making decisions it's about inspiring trust. When a leader takes the stage at an event, delivers a keynote, or speaks in a media interview, they establish themselves as an authority. This credibility extends beyond the event itself stakeholders take notice, employees feel inspired, and new opportunities arise.

On the other hand, public speaking also strengthens a leader's personal brand. In today's competitive business world, leaders who articulate ideas with confidence gain visibility and influence. Whether representing a company or a start-up, speaking well commands respect and fosters business growth



## IMPROVES PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

Business success depends on persuasion whether convincing investors to fund a venture, negotiating deals, or rallying a team around a vision. Public speaking refines a leader's ability to craft compelling narratives, structure arguments logically, and appeal to emotions.

Great leaders don't just present information; they tell stories that resonate. Mastering this skill enhances every aspect of business communication, from boardroom discussions to media interactions and company-wide announcements. Think of any industry leader or a great entrepreneur for a while. Don't they have exceptional persuasive communication skills?





# BUILDS CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Strong communication is a cornerstone of effective leadership. A CEO must confidently address shareholders, a start-up founder must pitch ideas to potential partners, and a business executive must engage employees in strategy discussions. Public speaking skills enable leaders to command attention, articulate visions clearly, and instil confidence in their audience.

When a leader speaks well, they earn the trust of teams, investors, and clients—ensuring smoother decision-making and stronger organizational alignment.



# STRENGTHENS CONNECTIONS WITH AUDIENCES

Unlike emails or reports, public speaking creates an immediate, personal connection with an audience. Leaders who communicate face-to-face can convey emotions, tell stories dynamically, and respond to real-time feedback.

In today's business landscape, authenticity is key. A leader who speaks directly to employees, clients, or the public fosters deeper trust and loyalty. This is particularly valuable in brand-building, where strong personal connections can set a company apart from its competitors.



# ENHANCES NETWORKING AND BUSINESS GROWTH

Public speaking isn't just about delivering speeches it's about making connections. Speaking at industry conferences, investor meetings, and business panels increases a leader's visibility, leading to new partnerships, investments, and career opportunities.

Many successful entrepreneurs credit their growth to networking, and public speaking provides a natural platform to engage with industry leaders, potential clients, and influential decision-makers.





# BOOSTS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND CONTENT INFLUENCE

A leader who masters public speaking can extend their influence beyond the stage. A powerful speech can be repurposed into blog posts, LinkedIn articles, podcasts, or video series—multiplying reach and reinforcing industry authority.

Moreover, speaking engagements themselves serve as a form of business marketing. Companies and start-ups that host webinars or live talks often gain substantial engagement, as audiences prefer interactive and educational content.



## HELPS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Unlike emails or reports, public speaking creates an immediate, personal connection with an audience. Leaders who communicate face-to-face can convey emotions, tell stories dynamically, and respond to real-time feedback.

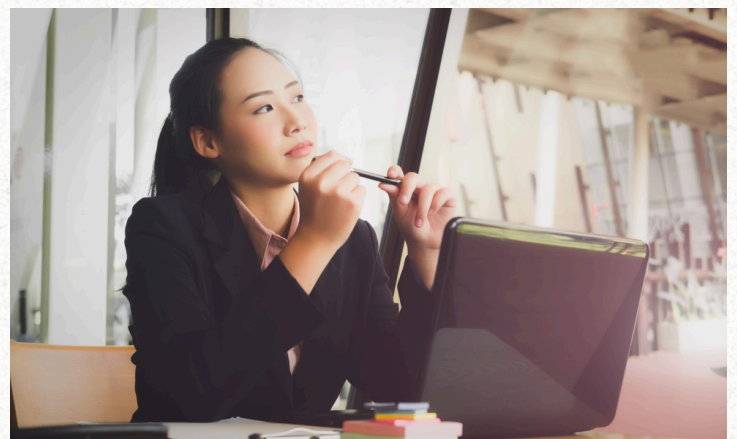
In today's business landscape, authenticity is key. A leader who speaks directly to employees, clients, or the public fosters deeper trust and loyalty. This is particularly valuable in brand-building, where strong personal connections can set a company apart from its competitors.



## INCREASES ADAPTABILITY AND QUICK THINKING

Live speaking engagements often come with unexpected challenges technical difficulties, difficult questions, or an unresponsive audience. Leaders who develop strong public speaking skills learn to think on their feet, adjust messaging in real time, and maintain composure under any circumstances.

This adaptability is crucial in business, whether handling investor negotiations, media interviews, or impromptu leadership meetings.





# MAXIMIZES IMPACT IN SALES AND INVESTOR PITCHES

For entrepreneurs, public speaking is a direct asset in securing funding and closing deals. The ability to present a start-up's value proposition with clarity and confidence increases the chances of winning investors and customers. Many high-stakes business situations require strong presentation skills, from launching new products to negotiating multimillion-dollar contracts. Leaders who master public speaking can articulate their business vision effectively, making them more compelling negotiators.



## ELEVATES A COMPANY'S BRAND PRESENCE

When a corporate leader represents their company at major industry events, they enhance not only their personal reputation but also their organization's credibility. A strong, engaging speaker acts as a brand ambassador, attracting new clients, investors, and talent.

For example, a CEO delivering a powerful speech at a global summit elevates their company's standing in the industry reinforcing its position as a market leader.



**BUT, no matter how essential public speaking is for the corporate leaders and entrepreneurs, it's become a nightmare for them. Most of them, nowadays, find it hard to speak to an audience, and due to the same reason, they lose their value in the corporate or the business field, quite unfortunately.**

**So, what are the common public speaking challenges? Here's a list with the solutions that can be given in general**



# SO, WHAT ARE THE COMMON PUBLIC SPEAKING CHALLENGES? HERE'S A LIST WITH THE SOLUTIONS THAT CAN BE GIVEN IN GENERAL:

## FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING (GLOSSOPHOBIA)

Solution: Practice regularly in small, low-pressure environments, such as team meetings or speaking clubs like Toastmasters. Visualization techniques and deep breathing can also help reduce anxiety.

## LACK OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Solution: Use storytelling, ask questions, and make eye contact to create a more interactive experience. Keep your content dynamic and tailored to your audience's interests.

## HANDLING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Solution: Use storytelling, ask questions, and make eye contact to create a more interactive experience. Keep your content dynamic and tailored to your audience's interests.

## SPEAKING TOO FAST OR TOO SLOW

Solution: Record yourself to analyse your pacing. Practice with a metronome or use pauses strategically to emphasize key points and allow your audience to absorb information.

## TECHNICAL ISSUES

Solution: Arrive early to check equipment, have backup slides or notes, and be prepared to continue speaking without visuals if necessary.

## FORGETTING KEY POINTS

Solution: Use a structured outline rather than memorizing word-for-word. If you forget a point, smoothly transition to the next topic and return to it later.

## NERVOUS BODY LANGUAGE

Solution: Stand confidently, use purposeful gestures, and maintain eye contact. Avoid fidgeting or crossing your arms, as these can make you appear less confident.

"Recently I did a public speaking session to a group of management graduates, and when I asked them to list down the public speaking fears they have, they came up with a list. Their main challenge was the language barrier. They said they are not fluent in the English language, and that their vocabulary was poor. Yes, English is definitely required for anyone to fly high when speaking to an audience, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you should refrain from speaking just because you don't know English at its best. English is not our native language, and everyone has to learn it step by step.

My advice is to learn while you speak in English. English may play a role in delivering the content, but content is just 7% of a whole speech. 38% is acquired by the voice and the tone, while the rest (55%) is ruled by the body language and expressions (refer to the image 01). We all make mistakes, and no one of us is a perfect speaker. So, don't let the language be a barrier on your path to becoming that great speaker. Make mistakes, it's okay... but make sure, you don't stop practising public speaking"



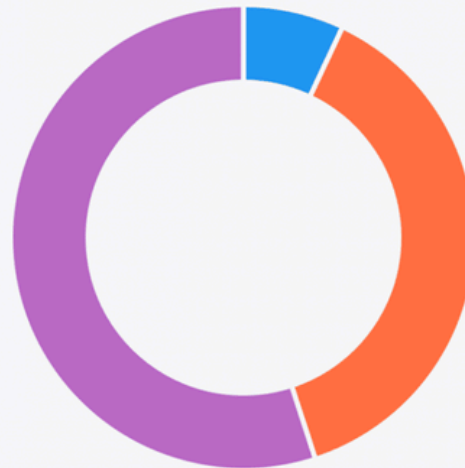
So, you see... Public speaking is no longer an optional skill for corporate leaders and entrepreneurs it is an essential one. It enhances credibility, strengthens persuasion, builds leadership confidence, and fosters deeper audience connections. In a fast-paced business world where attention is fleeting, those who communicate their message effectively stand out.

By mastering public speaking, business leaders can elevate their careers, expand their influence, and drive greater success for both themselves and their organizations. Whether addressing a global audience, investors, or employees, the ability to speak with confidence and clarity is a powerful asset that no leader should overlook.

### *Elements of personal communication*

Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% Rule

## Elements of Personal Communication



**7%**

**Spoken words**

**38%**

**Voice, tone**

**55%**

**Body language**





**“Public speaking is a crucial skill for corporate leaders and entrepreneurs, enhancing credibility, leadership presence, and persuasive communication. It strengthens investor relations, builds team confidence, and fosters business growth. By mastering public speaking, leaders can inspire, influence, and drive success in a competitive world.”**

## **MS. H.D. NIPUNI KARUNARATHNA**



**H.D. Nipuni Karunarathna**  
**Marketing Manager AAT Sri Lanka**  
**Chartered Marketer Creative Writer**  
**Event Host**  
**Visiting Lecturer**  
**Communications Specialist**

**MBA (UWTSD, UK)**  
**BSC Marketing Management (Special), USJ**  
**ACIM , AMSLIM**





# PAKISTAN - YET ANOTHER UNEXPLORED TRADE DESTINATION

Pakistan and Sri Lanka share warm and friendly relations through a long history based on religion, culture and trade. In modern times, both countries further cemented their cooperation through sports, technology, and defence. Pakistan and Sri Lanka commenced formal trade in 1955 by providing each other with the most-favoured nations status (MFN). On the trade front, Sri Lanka's exports to Pakistan were \$91.86 Mn in 2021, and Pakistan's exports were \$394.34 in the same year, while combined trade volumes were around USD 486 Mn. The trade balance between the two countries has been in favour of Pakistan for the last five (5) years. This is no surprise because the bigger economy usually tends to export more to the smaller economy in international trade. At present, Pakistan is the 26<sup>th</sup> export market for Sri Lanka, and it is the 12th import partner of Sri Lanka. The other notable feature is that neither country is in the other country's top 10 export or

import destinations. This was in contrast to the trade patterns in the past. In 1977, Pakistan was Sri Lanka's largest export market, with a share of 8.67%, supported by strong market penetration of traditional products such as Ceylon Tea, which amounted to 27,617 MT. Even In 1990, Pakistan accounted for 45.8% of Sri Lanka's exports to SAARC countries and 27.6% of Sri Lanka's imports from the same region. Thereafter, the trade volumes between the two countries showed a sharp decline. The trade landscape between Pakistan and Sri Lanka is supported by the Pakistan Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (PSFTA) signed in August 2002, effective July 2005, the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA). Under PSFTA, initially, Pakistan offered duty-free market access to 206 products, and Sri Lanka granted duty-free access to 102 products. Later, product coverage was increased to over 4000 products.



*Bilateral Trade Flow under Trade agreements, Value in US\$ Mn*

Agreement	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import
PSFTA	60.33	15.81	50.83	41.24	60.77	23.91	52.96	10.81	62.25	12.32
SAFTA	0.13	0.01	0.44	0.02	0.77	0.01	0.38	0.004	0.27	-
SAPTA	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.005	-	-	-	-	-

*Source: DOC*

However, under FTA concessions, Sri Lanka's low export volumes in 2021 amounted to 67% of total exports to Pakistan. The dominant partner, Pakistan, managed to channel around 93 % of its exports to Sri Lanka outside the PSFTA. PSFTA provides law tariff restrictions for both countries, but the existing negative list of non-tariff barriers has overshadowed the impacts of tariff rationalization under the PSFTA and has been the major impediment to export performance for both.

Future works on Sri Lanka-Pakistan trade under the FTA should focus more on identifying realistic export opportunities for Sri Lanka in Pakistan's markets and identifying the possible constraints that Sri Lankan exporters may face in diversifying their exports to Pakistan. A similar exercise should also happen in Pakistan since Sri Lanka is an important market for textile products, machinery, and pharmaceuticals, along with other products, and Pakistan records significant exports to other countries. Any FTA will provide a significant market share to partner countries on the drawing board, but getting the best out of FTA's is challenging for some countries. According to the trade complimentary index prepared by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2020), the bilateral trade between Islamabad, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka has a combined potential of over US\$ 2.7 billion. One of the major opportunities for Sri Lanka is to enhance its Tea exports, which have rapidly declined since 1970-80s. Sri Lanka lost the Pakistan Tea market to Kenya mainly due to the low cost of tea from Kenya. Though the imposition of quotas licenses is entirely against

the spirit of free trade, Sri Lanka needs to explore more innovative ways of utilizing the quota offered by Pakistan under the FTA for Sri Lankan Tea. The famous quote "The old questions can only be solved by new solutions," provides the direction to solve the challenge of utilizing the quota of up to 10,000 MT of Ceylon Tea in all forms under FTA. The recent market survey indicates the increased popularity of Sri Lankan construction materials in Pakistan.



Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka are lucrative investment destinations, and the proximity (1531 nautical miles) between Pakistan and Sri Lanka can be covered within 4 days; therefore, speedy delivery of goods is a positive factor for both countries. By and large, both countries are English-speaking countries with a sizable proportion of upwardly mobile middle-class income earners, providing excellent opportunities for marketing communication. Both governments must encourage their exporters to tap the partner country market by incentivizing and granting tax concessions on expenses incurred on research, innovation, and value addition and branding in the partner country to help them adjust to the demands of the partner country market.



In the case of Sri Lanka, the trade support measures need to be upgraded and among those are the need for rationalization of HS codes, Implementation of aggressive productivity improvement plan across the major industries, establishment of the national single window, introduction of progressive National Trade Policy (NTP) based on national interest, setting up of a specialized unit for market intelligence, granting subsidies to Sri Lankan exports and special grants to encourage SME' exports etc.



### **Ajith D Perera**

Executive Secretary – APTA Chamber of  
Commerce and Industry  
President – Professional Business Coaches  
Association,  
Secretary General/ CEO –(2014-2022)  
Federation of Chambers of Commerce and  
Industry of Sri Lanka





# REIMAGINING CREATIVITY: HOW AI IS REVOLUTIONISING THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY



The use of artificial intelligence (AI) has led to a significant shift in the advertising industry, which has traditionally been praised for its emphasis on human creativity and intuition. Artificial intelligence (AI) developments, especially in the areas of machine learning, natural language processing, and picture synthesis, are changing the way that ads are planned, created, and optimised. AI is now vital for ideation, producing, targeting, and analytics; it is no longer just a support tool. The paper investigates the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) on advertising, emphasising platforms and tools that have become essential and looks at how AI helps with cost reduction and creative simplicity.



## Key AI Tools and Platforms in Advertising

Today, advertisers have access to a vast array of AI technologies, each designed to expedite a particular step in the creative process. For instance, ChatGPT from OpenAI has gained popularity as a tool for creating marketing copy, scripts, and headlines, greatly speeding up the writing and brainstorming process. For concept art, storyboarding, and visual design, tools such as MidJourney and DALL-E are helpful since they specialise in producing high-quality images from text prompts, which are really useful in concept boards, mood boards, and storyboard design. AI-assisted editing and synthesis are made possible for video material through systems like Runway ML, which include capabilities like text-to-video production, video-to-video transfer, and backdrop removal.

Tools like Adobe Firefly and Canva AI, which use AI to help with graphic design and picture improvement, are being used by marketers and designers. These platforms make high-quality design tools more accessible to everyone. Furthermore, Synthesys and Pictory provide speech synthesis and video generation with AI avatars, making it possible to produce instructional films and business communications quickly and affordably. AI is used in strategy formulation via technologies like Brandwatch and Sprinklr to observe trends and analyse emotions, providing useful information for focused advertising efforts.

## The Rise of AI in Advertising

These days, AI plays a crucial role in all phases of the advertising process. AI technologies examine past content, trends, and consumer data all through the ideation stage to produce strategic insights and even suggest original ideas. Automation and content generation help production processes by facilitating the quick production of exceptional images, videos, and copy. Machine learning algorithms accurately predict user behaviour and tailor ad distribution. Additionally, by analysing campaign effectiveness in real-time, AI simplifies analytics and enables marketers to optimise plans at a pace never before possible. This evolution indicates a significant change in the composition and operation of advertising processes.



## Cost-Efficiency and Democratisation of Creativity

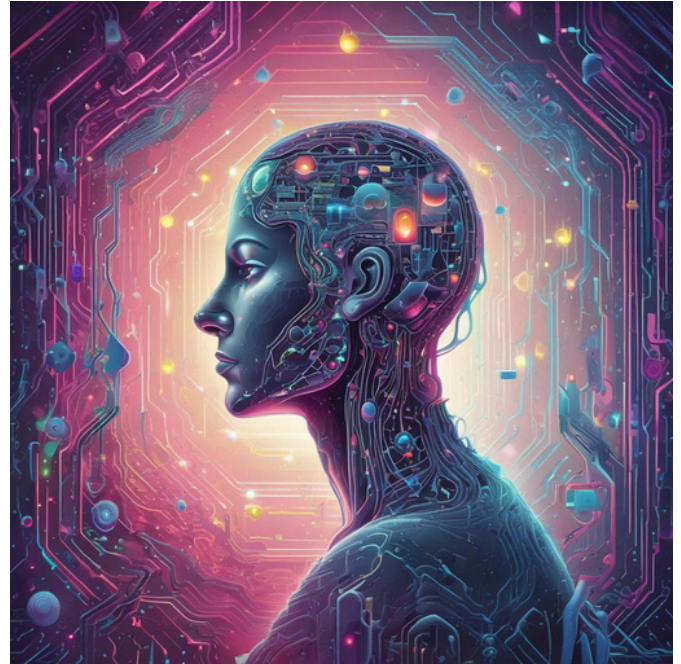
AI's capacity to significantly lower manufacturing costs is among its most important advantages for the advertising industry. A few carefully thought-out prompts plus AI algorithms may now create an engaging advertisement when, in the past, a campaign could have required a whole creative team, picture shoots, and substantial post-production. The procedure is now considerably quicker and less expensive due to this change. AI avatars and speech generators, for example, may perform professional acting and voice acting duties for a fraction of the expense of video production.

Additionally, AI allows creative content to be iterated and versioned more quickly, saving time and permitting more flexibility. Campaigns are easily customisable for various languages, demographics, or geographical areas, allowing for large-scale customisation. Crucially, startups and small enterprises are empowered by this shift. These businesses can now compete with bigger brands while having fewer resources by using AI to create promotional materials of a high calibre. This democratisation of creativity guarantees that financial resources won't hinder innovation.

## AI in Creative Decision-Making

Beyond implementation, artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing creative direction. Examining big datasets and providing insights into audience preferences, cultural trends, and emotional resonance facilitates data-driven innovation. ChatGPT and similar platforms might provide ideas that align with company values and the state of the industry, giving creative teams a foundation on which to work. Through the real-time generation and evaluation of numerous creative variations, AI also improves the efficacy

of A/B testing. Dynamic optimisation is supported by this quick feedback loop, which guarantees that only the most effective advertisements are shown to the intended audience. Additionally, by examining content for representation and minimising unconscious prejudice, AI promotes better inclusion and diversity in creative outputs. By using this layer of analysis, campaigns are certain to connect with a wider range of people.



## Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Despite the benefits, there are certain difficulties in using AI in advertising. One of the main worries is that brand storytelling may become less accurate. Although AI is capable of producing text and images quickly, it does not have the cultural background and emotional depth that human creatives do.

In the creative profession, there are also genuine concerns about job displacement. Some jobs, especially in copywriting, design, and producing, may become redundant as AI capabilities advance. This reality underscores the necessity for ongoing personnel reskilling and upskilling, as well as job redefinition, to prioritise activities requiring intuitive thinking, empathy, and strategic oversight.



# THE FUTURE:

# HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION



In the future, advertising will depend on human-AI collaboration. AI is an enhancement tool that increases productivity and opens up new creative possibilities rather than taking the place of creative people. AI-generated drafts can serve as a starting point for copywriters, who can then refine them with their own unique style and brand voice. Designers may refine AI-generated images to provide cultural significance and emotional nuance. By using AI insights, strategists may create campaign tactics that are more accurate and flexible.

This collaborative approach will encourage a more dynamic and integrated creative process where AI's analytical capabilities and human inventiveness work in unison. Agencies and brands that embrace this synergy will lead the industry in creativity, engagement, and impact as AI technologies continue to advance.





**In conclusion, the advertising business is entering a new era characterised by speed, accessibility, and brilliant inventiveness thanks to artificial intelligence. The process of creating ads has become more strategic, inclusive, and cost-effective thanks to solutions like ChatGPT, MidJourney, DALL-E, and Runway ML. AI is changing the definition of advertising in the digital era by lowering entrance barriers and fostering creativity driven by data. Those who can use both human and computer power to create compelling, inspirational, and conversion-oriented stories will be the ones of the future.**

## **MS. R. T. B. S. R. RAJAKARUNA**



**R. T. B. S. R. Rajakaruna**

Graduand

Faculty of Management Studies

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



## HOW BANKS AND INSURERS ARE POWERING THE SUSTAINABILITY REVOLUTION

**NILUKA ABEYGUNARATNE,**

CFA, FCA, ACCA, BSC (HONS) (UK) – CHIEF ACCOUNTANT, PACIFIC LIFE INSURANCE (CANADA)

PRESIDENT, CA SRI LANKA – CANADA CHAPTER

---

### THE FUTURE OF FINANCE IS ALREADY HERE

Imagine this: you're part of a team at a major bank, deciding whether to fund a large hydropower project in Sri Lanka, or maybe you're evaluating if a plantation company is doing enough to protect biodiversity.

Alternatively, picture yourself working at an insurance company, designing products to shield low-income families from climate-related disasters.

This isn't some distant future, it's already happening. Sustainability is reshaping the way banks, insurers, and finance professionals operate. For students preparing to enter this field, these shifts will shape their careers more than any exam or GPA ever could.





Recalling my university life, I still remember learning the concept of “sustainability”. Back then, it was limited to a concept called “externalities”, pollution or social costs that didn’t show up on a profit and loss statement. It felt like an afterthought, tucked into the final chapter of a textbook.

Fast forward to today, and my desk in Toronto tells a different story. Alongside spreadsheets and earnings reports, I’m reviewing climate models, Scope 3 emission maps, and decarbonization strategies. Sustainability is no longer a side topic; it’s at the heart of modern finance.

## WHEN CLIMATE RISK BECOMES A FINANCIAL RISK

Across Canada and around the globe, financial institutions are under pressure to manage climate-related risks, reduce their financed emissions, and disclose how resilient they are in a warming world. At the Fortune 500 insurance company where I work, I see firsthand how climate-related losses have become a central part of the industry’s risk landscape. In 2023, Canada experienced its worst wildfire season on record, with over 18 million hectares burned, leading to more than CAD 3.1 billion in insured losses.

The impact is global, and Sri Lanka is no exception. In Sri Lanka, the effects of climate change are personal. Droughts, floods, landslides, and extreme heat are becoming more frequent, displacing families, damaging infrastructure, and disrupting livelihoods. These events trigger a chain reaction: increased insurance claims, reduced agricultural output, rising non-performing loans, and strained financial systems. In 2021, Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation reported a surge in weather-related claims, prompting a re-evaluation of its climate risk models.

This isn’t just an environmental issue; it’s a financial one.

## HOW THE FINANCE INDUSTRY IS ADAPTING

Banks are now asking whether a company’s carbon footprint makes it a credit risk. Insurers are adjusting premiums based on exposure to natural disasters. Investors are screening portfolios for climate resilience. The consequences of inaction, stranded assets, regulatory penalties, and reputational damage are now too big to ignore.

Take TD Bank, one of Canada’s Big Five Banks. It has committed over CAD 80 billion to sustainable finance. Manulife, a leading Canadian insurer, is tracking the carbon footprint of its lending and insurance portfolios. These companies now treat environmental performance with the same seriousness as profitability. Globally, insurers like Aviva and AXA are not just covering the damage but investing in climate-resilient infrastructure and divesting from polluters. This is the new normal.

You may have come across terms like Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions or climate stress testing. Here’s a quick breakdown:

**SCOPE 1: DIRECT EMISSIONS, LIKE FUEL USED BY COMPANY VEHICLES.**

**SCOPE 2: INDIRECT EMISSIONS FROM PURCHASED ELECTRICITY.**

**SCOPE 3: ALL OTHER EMISSIONS, THOSE FROM SUPPLIERS, CUSTOMERS, AND END-USE.**

Scope 3 is the hardest to track but often the largest share and the greatest risk.

In Sri Lanka, this transition is gaining momentum. Commercial Bank is offering green loans for solar installations. Janashakthi Insurance is exploring microinsurance for farmers facing unpredictable weather. These may be smaller initiatives than Canada’s, but they are no less important.



What's changing rapidly is how these efforts are being reported. Just like financial statements track profits and losses, companies are now expected to disclose their environmental and social performance. The International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) has introduced global standards, making sustainability reporting as essential and regulated as financial reporting.

Sri Lanka is already taking steps. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and CA Sri Lanka are preparing listed companies for this shift. CA Sri Lanka has issued guidance on integrated and sustainability reporting. John Keells Holdings (JKH) is a standout example, which publishes a detailed Sustainability Report aligned with global frameworks like GRI and TCFD, covering everything from emissions to supply chain risk.

## FROM DISCLOSURE TO DECISION-MAKING

In Canada, banks and insurers are using scenario modelling to ask tough but necessary questions:

What if the world warms by two degrees? What if new climate policies make fossil fuels unaffordable?

These aren't theoretical anymore; they're embedded in strategic planning. Over 40% of financial institutions in Canada use dashboards to visualize emissions, flood zones, and sustainability goals.

The incentives are growing, too. Energy-efficient homeowners enjoy better mortgage rates. Startups working on carbon capture are landing major investments. Banks are linking loan interest rates to sustainability targets: meet your goals, and you pay less; fall short, and you pay more.

In Sri Lanka, similar seeds are being planted. Agri-tech startups are helping farmers use weather data to make smarter decisions.

Eco-resorts are securing green financing. Exporters are being asked to report on sustainability to retain foreign buyers. Even insurance companies are innovating. In Canada, Aviva offers discounts to customers who drive electric vehicles or install solar panels. Others are investing directly in green infrastructure. They're not just mitigating risks; they're funding the solutions.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



**So, what does this mean for students in Sri Lanka?**

It means the finance industry you're about to join is undergoing a transformation. Yes, you'll still work with balance sheets and audits, but you'll also analyze emissions data, review sustainability disclosures, and maybe even use satellite imagery to assess deforestation risks.

Imagine being an auditor, not just checking if a company made a profit but verifying the accuracy of its climate disclosures. Similarly, picture yourself as a financial analyst deciding whether to finance a wind farm or a coal plant. Or, from another perspective, helping an insurer decide if coastal homes will still be insurable ten years from now.

These roles are no longer futuristic; they're already in demand as new job titles are emerging: ESG Analyst, Climate Risk Auditor, and Sustainable Finance Advisor.





# BE PART OF THE CHANGE

In today's world, saying "we care about the environment" isn't enough. Companies need to prove it. That's where future accountants, analysts, and finance professionals come in. You'll be the ones making sure claims are backed by data, strategies are credible, and trust is earned.

Whether you're studying accounting, finance, economics, or management, this is your opportunity. The world needs professionals who understand both the language of business and the principles of sustainability.

And the best part? You don't have to be an expert today. What you need is curiosity, adaptability, and a willingness to learn how finance, the environment, and society are all connected. So, to every student reading this from Colombo to Kandy, Jaffna to Galle, remember this: the world of finance is changing, and people like you need to lead that change. Because sustainability isn't just good for the planet. It's good business. It's smart finance. And it's the foundation for future success.

Sri Lanka may be a small island, but it's connected to some of the world's biggest challenges and opportunities. As the next generation of finance professionals, you hold the key to turning those challenges into lasting impact. Even now, as a student, you can begin. Learn the language: carbon footprints, green bonds, net-zero, TCFD, and nature-based solutions. These aren't just buzzwords; they're the vocabulary of your future.

So, the next time you're buried in auditing or finance notes, remind yourself: You're not just studying for a job. You're preparing to help build a world where accountants prevent floods, bankers build wind farms, and insurers help communities bounce back from climate disasters.

## **GREEN IS THE NEW GOLD, AND BE READY TO UNLOCK IT.**



# AI and eLearning:

## TRANSFORMING DIGITAL BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

In the rapidly evolving digital business landscape, two technological forces are reshaping how companies operate, innovate, and succeed: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and eLearning. As businesses strive to stay competitive in an increasingly digital world integrating these technologies, particularly through advanced Learning Management Systems (LMS), is proving to be a game-changer, significantly impacting overall business performance. This article explores how AI-powered eLearning solutions are revolutionizing digital businesses, with a special focus on customized learning paths, talent analytics integration, and the pivotal role of Learning Management Systems.

### The Rise of AI in Digital Business

Artificial Intelligence has transitioned from a futuristic concept to a present-day reality, becoming integral to digital business strategies. AI encompasses a range of technologies that enable machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation.

In the context of digital business, AI is being applied across various domains, including customer service, marketing and sales, operations, and product development. However, one of the most transformative applications of AI is in the realm of learning and development, particularly when integrated with Learning Management Systems.

### eLearning and Learning Management Systems: The New Frontier of Workforce Development

eLearning has evolved from simple digital courses to sophisticated, interactive platforms that cater to diverse learning needs. At the heart of this evolution are Learning Management Systems (LMS), which have become crucial for:

1. **Centralized Learning:** LMS provides a single platform for all learning activities, making it easier to manage and track employee development and stay up-to-date with regulations.

2. **Content Delivery:** LMS enables efficient distribution of learning materials, from text and video to interactive simulations.
3. **Progress Tracking:** These systems allow both learners and managers to monitor learning progress and performance.
4. **Compliance Management:** LMS ensures all employees complete required training and stay up-to-date with regulations.

### The Synergy of AI and LMS in Boosting Business Performance

Integrating AI into Learning Management Systems creates a powerful synergy that significantly enhances digital business performance. Here's how:

#### 1. Customized Learning Paths

One of the most significant advantages of AI-powered LMS is the ability to create personalized learning experiences. Traditional one-size-fits-all training programs are replaced by dynamic, adaptive learning paths tailored to each employee's needs, skills, and career goals.

AI algorithms analyze various data points, including:

- An employee's current skill set.
- Their learning style and pace.
- Job role and career aspirations.
- Performance data and skill gaps.



Based on this analysis, the AI-powered LMS can:

- Recommend relevant courses and learning materials.
- Adjust the difficulty level of content in real-time.
- Suggest optimal times for learning based on the employee's work patterns.
- Provide personalized assessments to reinforce learning.

For example, a marketing professional might receive a customized path that includes courses on the latest digital marketing trends, data analytics, and customer behavior analysis, while a software developer might get a path focused on new programming languages and cybersecurity practices.

This level of personalization ensures that each employee receives the most relevant training in the most effective manner, accelerating skill acquisition and improving job performance.

## 2. Talent Analytics Integration.

AI-powered LMS goes beyond just delivering content; it becomes a powerful tool for talent analytics. By collecting and analyzing data on employee learning behaviors, preferences, and outcomes, these systems provide valuable insights for HR and management teams.

Key benefits of talent analytics integration include:

- **Skill Gap Analysis:** AI can identify skill gaps across the organization by comparing current employee competencies with required skills for various roles.
- **Predictive Performance Modeling:** By correlating learning data with performance metrics, AI can predict which employees are likely to excel in certain roles or who might need additional support.

- **Succession Planning:** The system can identify employees with potential leadership roles based on their learning progress and acquired skills.
- **ROI Measurement:** AI can help quantify the impact of learning initiatives on business performance, allowing for more informed decisions on training investments.

For instance, a large tech company used AI-powered talent analytics to identify high-potential employees for fast-track leadership programs, resulting in improved retention rates and a stronger leadership pipeline.

## 3. Adaptive Assessments and Continuous Learning

AI-powered LMS can create adaptive assessments that adjust based on a learner's responses in real time. This ensures that assessments are neither too easy (which can lead to boredom) nor too difficult (which can cause frustration).

Moreover, these systems promote continuous learning by:

- Sending personalized reminders for learning activities.
- Recommending micro-learning modules for just-in-time skill development.
- Providing spaced repetition of key concepts to enhance retention.
- Offering virtual coaching and performance support.

## 4. Enhanced Collaboration and Social Learning

AI can facilitate more effective collaboration and social learning within the LMS by:

- Matching learners with mentors based on skills and career goals.

- Recommending peer groups for collaborative projects
- Identifying subject matter experts within the organization
- Curating user-generated content and highlighting valuable contributions

This fosters a culture of knowledge sharing and collaborative learning crucial for innovation and adaptability in digital businesses.

## 5. Content Curation and Creation

AI algorithms can continuously scan internal and external sources to curate the most relevant and up-to-date learning content. This ensures that the learning material within the LMS stays current with industry trends and organizational needs.

Additionally, AI can assist in content creation by:

- Generating personalized quizzes and assessments.
- Creating summaries of lengthy documents or videos.
- Translating content into multiple languages for global teams.
- Suggesting improvements to existing course materials based on learner feedback and performance data.

## Challenges and Considerations

While the benefits of AI-powered LMS are significant, there are challenges to consider:

1. **Data Privacy and Security:** With AI systems processing vast amounts of employee data, ensuring data privacy and security is paramount.

2. **Change Management:** Implementing an AI-powered LMS requires careful change management to ensure employee buy-in and adoption.

3. **Integration with Existing Systems:** The LMS needs to integrate seamlessly with other HR and business systems for maximum effectiveness.

4. **Balancing AI and Human Touch:** While AI can personalize learning, it's important to maintain human elements in the learning process, such as mentorship and peer interaction.

## Future Trends

Looking ahead, several trends are likely to shape the future of AI and LMS in digital business:

1. **Augmented and Virtual Reality Integration:** Immersive learning experiences will become more common, especially for technical and soft skills training.
2. **Natural Language Processing Advancements:** Improved NLP will lead to more sophisticated virtual tutors and chatbots within the LMS.
3. **Emotion AI:** Systems can detect and respond to learners' emotional states, further personalizing the learning experience.
4. **Blockchain for Credentialing:** Secure, verifiable digital credentials will become standard, making it easier for employees to showcase their skills.





# Conclusion

Integrating AI into Learning Management Systems transforms digital business performance by enabling highly personalized, data-driven, and adaptive learning experiences. By leveraging AI's analytical power within their LMS, businesses can create a responsive, skilled workforce capable of thriving in the digital age.

However, success in this new landscape requires more than just implementing new technologies. It demands a strategic approach that aligns AI-powered learning initiatives with business goals, addresses challenges head-on, and fosters a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

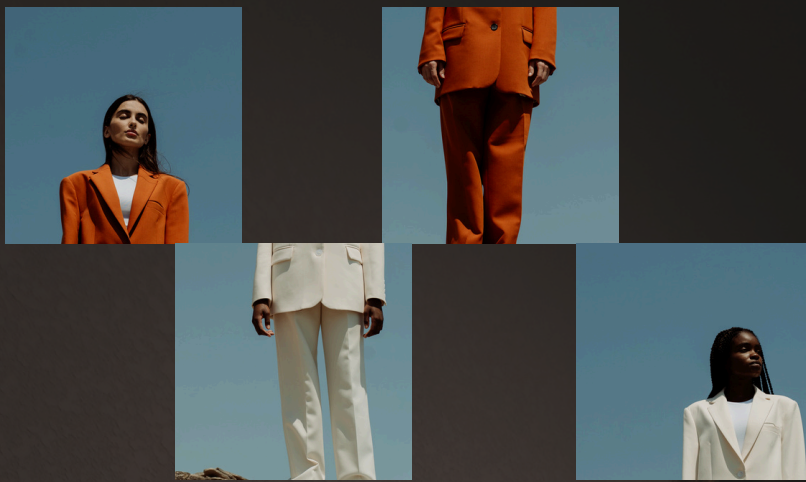
As we move forward, the businesses that will lead in the digital economy will be those that effectively harness the synergy between AI and LMS, creating organizations that are not just digitally enabled but continuously learning and adapting to the ever-changing digital landscape.

## MR. SANJAYA ELVITIGALA



### **Sanjaya Elvitigala**

LMS & SaaS Consultant | AI Researcher  
CEO at eLearning.lk - Co-Founder at Maya.lk  
Award-winning serial entrepreneur  
MBA – SJP, BIT UoC



# *Revolutionize the Sri Lankan* **FASHION INDUSTRY WITH VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS**

Virtual influencers have emerged as a transformative force in the Sri Lankan fashion industry, reflecting broader global trends in digital marketing and consumer engagement. With social media penetration reaching critical mass, brands now strategically deploy both human and virtual influencers to drive sales and influence purchasing decisions, signalling a paradigm shift in marketing approaches.

AI-generated personas characterized by hyper-realistic appearances and meticulously crafted digital identities are revolutionizing fashion marketing by capturing younger demographics and amplifying brand visibility. Their growing credibility as endorsers originates from their ability to foster emotional connections comparable to human influencers, while providing brands with unique creative control over brand stories.

Research indicates that these digital personas can increase brand awareness and purchase intentions, particularly among tech-native audiences who prioritize social media interactions. This engagement is further amplified by their use in targeted marketing campaigns, enabling brands to align their messaging with consumer values.

Despite their growing popularity, integrating virtual influencers into Sri Lanka's fashion industry presents challenges. Success will depend on understanding consumer preferences and effectively incorporating these influencers into e-commerce platforms. As AI and CGI technologies continue to undergo further transformations, brands are being offered new opportunities to engage consumers and innovate their strategies within today's fashion dialogue.

Virtual Influencers are computer-generated digital personas designed to interact with audiences on social media platforms, mimicking the role of human influencers. They are created using advanced technologies such as CGI (computer-generated imagery), motion capture, and artificial intelligence, and can range from stylized cartoon-like figures to hyper-realistic human-like characters.

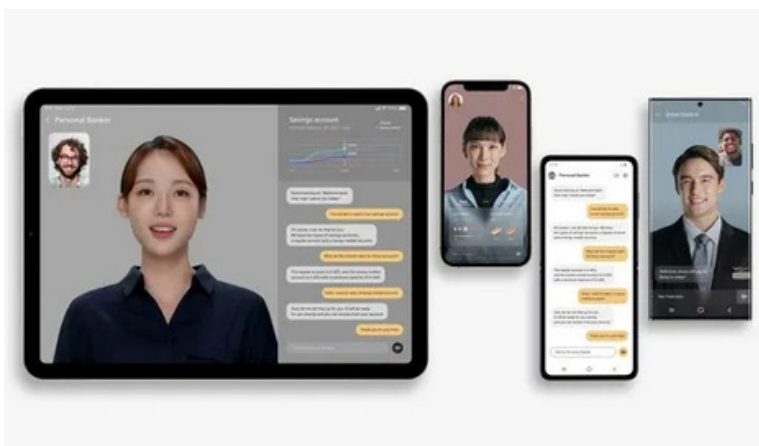


# THE EVOLUTION

## OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS IN SRI LANKA

The role of virtual influencers in the Sri Lankan fashion industry is a relatively new phenomenon, coinciding with the broader digital revolution taking place in the country. Influencer marketing in Sri Lanka has evolved rapidly, although it is still in its infancy stage compared to more developed markets. The concept of influencers as brand ambassadors emerged as a powerful marketing strategy, with brands initially focusing on traditional social media influencers (SMIs). However, the rise of virtual influencers has started to reshape the landscape.

The increasing adoption of social media platforms has created fertile ground for virtual influencers to flourish in Sri Lanka. By 2032, the global virtual influencer market is projected to reach USD 195.9 billion, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.14%. This remarkable growth trajectory indicates the substantial potential for virtual influencers to transform marketing strategies within the local fashion industry.



Notable developments in the global context include virtual personalities created by major international brands, such as Samsung's NEON and L'Oréal's Shudu, which have established precedents for utilizing digital personas in fashion and beauty marketing. These examples provide valuable blueprints for Sri Lankan marketers exploring innovative approaches to consumer engagement and brand positioning.

### Chubs: Sri Lanka's First Virtual Influencer

Chubs, launched by the Sri Lankan tech start-up CreativeHub Global in June 2023, is recognized as the country's first virtual influencer. Chubs serves as a pioneering figure in the integration of virtual influencers into the Sri Lanka, effectively revolutionizing digital engagement and global collaborations in this domain. The introduction of Chubs highlights the potential for virtual influencers to reshape consumer behavior, encouraging followers to adopt similar styles.



# SHIFTING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

As social media usage has surged in Sri Lanka, brands are increasingly leveraging both human and virtual influencers to drive sales and influence consumer behaviour. This shift in marketing strategies reflects a recognition of the changing ways consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions in the digital age.

Virtual influencers possess distinct advantages over their human counterparts, including perfect appearances that never age or change, 24/7 availability, and the ability to appear in multiple locations simultaneously. These characteristics make them particularly appealing to younger demographics, which are digital natives who are comfortable engaging with non-human entities in the virtual space.

Research indicates that virtual influencers can positively affect consumer purchasing behaviour, leading to increased brand awareness and purchase intention. This phenomenon occurs as consumers interact with and form emotional connections to virtual characters, paralleling relationships formed with human influencers. The effectiveness of these digital personas in shaping consumer preferences highlights their growing importance in the marketing environment.

The transition of consumer behaviour from traditional to online platforms has been accelerated by digital marketing, with younger demographics especially inclined to engage with social media to discover fashion trends and products. Virtual influencers facilitate this engagement, serving as digital tastemakers who influence purchasing decisions and brand perceptions.



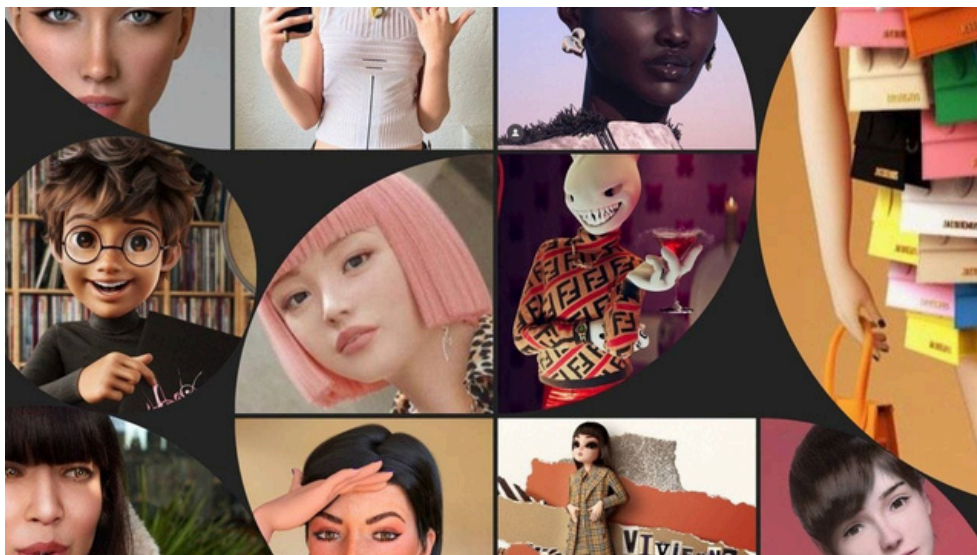


# VALUE IN MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

As social media usage has surged in Sri Lanka, brands are increasingly leveraging both human and virtual influencers to drive sales and influence consumer behaviour. This shift in marketing strategies reflects a recognition of the changing ways consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions in the digital age.

Virtual influencers possess distinct advantages over their human counterparts, including perfect appearances that never age or change, 24/7 availability, and the ability to appear in multiple locations simultaneously. These characteristics make them particularly appealing to younger demographics, which are digital natives who are comfortable engaging with non-human entities in the virtual space.

Research indicates that virtual influencers can positively affect consumer purchasing behaviour, leading to increased brand awareness and purchase intention. This phenomenon occurs as consumers interact with and form emotional connections to virtual characters, paralleling relationships formed with human influencers. The effectiveness of these digital personas in shaping consumer preferences highlights their growing importance in the marketing environment.





# STRATEGIC APPLICATIONS IN FASHION MARKETING

Fashion brands in Sri Lanka have begun integrating virtual influencers into their marketing strategies to capitalize on their unique appeal. By leveraging these digital personas, brands can create personalized marketing experiences that resonate with consumers while maintaining complete control over the messaging and presentation, something impossible with human influencers.

The strategic use of virtual influencers allows for targeted campaigns that align with the values and interests of specific audience segments. This is particularly valuable for communicating sustainability and ethical consumption messages, which are becoming increasingly important in fashion industry discourse.



As the digital setting evolves, the adaptability of brands to incorporate virtual influencers may determine their competitive edge within the industry. Those who successfully integrate these digital personas into their marketing mix gain access to new creative possibilities and engagement opportunities that transcend the limitations of traditional influencer partnerships.



# CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS



Despite their growing popularity, the integration of virtual influencers within the Sri Lankan fashion industry faces several significant challenges that must be addressed for effective implementation.

One of the primary challenges surrounding virtual influencers is the question of **authenticity**. Consumers may find it difficult to fully trust virtual influencers due to their non-human nature, which can lead to distrust regarding the sincerity of their endorsements. This issue could potentially undermine the relationship between brands and their target audiences if not properly managed. Brands must carefully balance the creative possibilities of virtual influencers with the need to maintain transparent and honest communication with consumers.

Another significant challenge pertains to **ownership and copyright rights** related to virtual influencers. The legal framework remains ambiguous regarding who owns the rights to a digital avatar created from scratch versus a digital representation of an existing person. This is particularly problematic in cases where virtual representations of deceased celebrities are used in marketing

campaigns. Clarifying these legal issues will be crucial for brands looking to leverage virtual influencers without facing potential legal repercussions. The development of comprehensive legal frameworks specific to digital personas will likely become increasingly important as their use becomes more widespread.

**Consumer preferences** present another challenge, as audiences might still favour human models over virtual influencers. Despite the increasing popularity of digital personalities, questions remain about whether consumers in Sri Lanka can be persuaded to fully embrace virtual influencers as legitimate endorsers for fashion products and brands. Brands need to gauge consumer sentiment and adapt their strategies accordingly to ensure virtual influencers resonate with their target markets. This may involve introducing these digital personas gradually, alongside traditional human influencers, to build familiarity and acceptance among consumers.

The integration of virtual influencers into e-commerce platforms presents both opportunities and challenges. While immersive shopping experiences and personalized recommendations can enhance consumer engagement, brands must also navigate the technical aspects of incorporating virtual influencers effectively into their online platforms. This requires **investment in technology and resources**, which may pose a barrier for smaller brands in the Sri Lankan fashion market. Collaborative approaches and shared resources may help overcome these limitations, allowing businesses of various sizes to benefit from virtual influencer marketing.



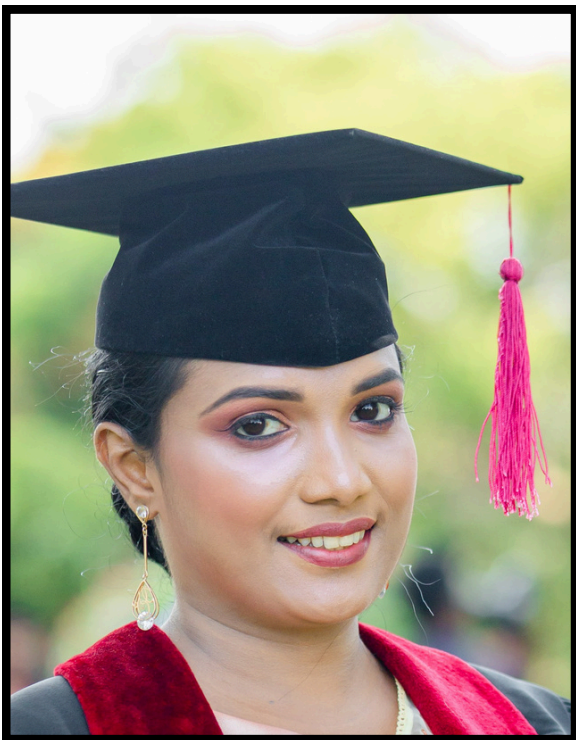


# Future Prospects AND APPLICATIONS

The utility of virtual influencers extends beyond fashion into various sectors, including entertainment, education, and customer service. This versatility suggests that the impact of virtual influencers could permeate multiple aspects of the Sri Lankan economy, reshaping how businesses engage with consumers across different industries.



As advances in AI and CGI technologies continue to evolve, the capabilities and realism of virtual influencers will likely improve, further increasing their appeal and effectiveness. Brands that begin experimenting with these digital personas now will be better positioned to capitalize on future developments in this rapidly evolving field.



**Warunika N. Hettiarachchi**  
Lecturer  
Department of Marketing Management  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



A Leo is a young leader dedicated to making a positive impact on the world and beyond the community, standing for Leadership, Experience, and Opportunity. Leos are the youth arms of the society fostered by the Lions Club, continuously focusing on providing meaningful social services for a better future. Leos are the vitals of the community since they are focusing on solving the pressing challenges in today's world by bringing fresh energy, innovation, and fresh perspectives.

In addition, Leos give young people the chance to become leaders, acquire life experiences, and significantly influence the communities. Along with addressing community issues, including environmental cleanups and educational initiatives, Leo members develop their public speaking, project management, and teamwork abilities via various projects.



# SABRA LEOS: LEADING THE WAY FOR A GREENER FUTURE

Furthermore, Leo members can have global rewards and recognition by participating in worldwide activities as members of the international Lions Clubs worldwide network which broadens their perceptions and allows them to have a comprehensive dedication to world concerns. The club always emphasizes variation and diversity, fostering understanding and respect between people and communities as well as building strong bonds. The dedication of club members to environmental sustainability is in line with achieving the sustainable development objective. Sabra Leos always focuses on the environmental impact of their projects, and they always try to minimize the carbon footprint of the projects.

The Leo Club of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka stands with the theme of 'Dedication beyond expectation' in a world where young leaders are stepping towards volunteer services. As one of the most dedicated university-based omega clubs, the Leo Club of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka has completed over 50 transformative sustainable projects in the remarkable era of the 2023/24 Leoistic year.

With their massive efforts, Sabra Leos was awarded the Most Outstanding University-based Omega Club and was 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up. Also, the club won 21 awards, including 11 club awards and 10 individual awards in the RESILIENCIA'24, the Leo District awards, and 306 C2. This recognition stands as a testament to the club member's unwavering commitment.

presidentship of Leo Ashen Perera (The leoistic year 2022/23). This period also was a shining era for the club proceedings.



LEO CLUB OF SABARAGAMUWA UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

Currently, Sabra Leos soared at a new height under the visionary and inspirational presidentship of Leo Awantha Darma Sri for the leoistic year 2023/24. With the theme of 'Dedication beyond expectation, the relentless efforts of the Executive team, the Board of directors, and passionate club members, the club has been propelled to the next high level. With that Sabra Leos could become a beacon of community service, leadership, and innovation within the university and the community.

Furthermore, the club could not have made these remarkable eras with prestigious awards without the marvelous advisors of Mr. Achintha Ekanayake, the former staff advisor of Sabra Leos, and Ms. Ishara Katuwandeniya, the current staff advisor of Sabra Leos. Their guidance, support, and valuable insights have been pivotal in navigating the club towards its current success. Their mentorship has also been the cornerstone of Sabra Leo's journey.

With this valuable mentorship, the club established a distinguished brand, "Sabra Leos". As a respected University-Based omega club, the Leo Club of Sabaragamuwa University always prioritizes sustainable projects and valuable community services over rewards.

Sabra Leo's unwavering commitment to genuine community service has organically elevated the club's reputation. And it allows the club to shine progressively brighter.

The core objective of Sabra Leos is to serve the community wholeheartedly, and this dedication positively impacts both the club's continuity and the personal growth of its members. Engaging in volunteer services as Leos not only benefits those in need but also fosters invaluable skills among students, such as leadership, teamwork, and empathy. This altruistic approach creates a virtuous cycle of giving, where the act of serving others enhances the well-being and development of the volunteers themselves. As Sabra Leos continues to serve with passion and integrity, they inspire a culture of volunteerism and community spirit, making a lasting difference in the lives they touch and solidifying their role as a beacon of positive change within the university and beyond.



By becoming a Sabra Leo, members can gain a multitude of advantages that extend far beyond the immediate gratification of community service and invaluable leadership skills. Nevertheless, learning to coordinate projects, manage teams, and make impactful decisions as well. Also, the collaborative environment fosters strong teamwork and effective communication, essential skills for any future career. Additionally, Sabra Leos members build a vast network of like-minded individuals and mentors, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth.



The experience of volunteering and making a tangible difference in the community instills a deep sense of empathy, responsibility, and purpose. Members also have access to numerous training programs, workshops, and events that enhance their competencies and broaden their horizons. Ultimately, being a part of Sabra Leos not only enriches one's university experience but also lays a strong foundation for a successful and fulfilling future.

Step into the shining era of Sabra Leos and discover a wealth of experience that will equip the member's university journey to be remarkable. By engaging with the dynamic community, members will gain invaluable skills, foster meaningful connections, and make a lasting impact through dedicated services as well. This transformative journey supports the university life experiences and helps with professional life and career goals that will benefit throughout the lifetime. Seize the opportunity to be part of a prestigious organization that not only shapes your university experience but also prepares you for a successful and fulfilling future.

Join us in creating a lasting impact and watch how your time with Sabra Leos becomes a powerful catalyst for growth and achievement. Hence, embrace the chance to grow, lead, and inspire, and let your time with Sabra Leos be a catalyst for both personal and professional success.



**P. S. Hewawasam**  
Leo Member



