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Editorial

It is with great pleasure that we present this Special Issue of the South Asian Journal of Business Insights (SAJBI) under the theme "Business Resilience and Strategic Agility in Turbulent South Asian Economies." This special issue comes at a time when organizations across South Asia continue to navigate a complex business environment characterized by economic volatility, technological disruption, changing consumer expectations, geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, and evolving institutional conditions. In such an environment, the capacity of organizations not only to withstand disruptions but also to adapt, learn, innovate, and strategically respond has become increasingly important.

The theme of this Special Issue reflects an important shift in contemporary management thinking. Resilience is no longer viewed merely as an organization's ability to survive a crisis. Rather, it encompasses the capabilities required to anticipate disruption, respond effectively, maintain continuity, and adapt to changing circumstances. Similarly, strategic agility concerns an organization's ability to sense environmental changes, make timely decisions, reconfigure resources, and pursue emerging opportunities. These capabilities are particularly significant in South Asian economies, where organizations frequently operate amid resource constraints, institutional uncertainty, technological transitions, and rapidly changing markets.

This Special Issue brings together five scholarly contributions that examine different dimensions of resilience, adaptability, technology, people, and strategic response. Although the papers employ different theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and empirical contexts, they collectively highlight a common message: organizational resilience and agility are multidimensional capabilities that emerge from the interaction of technology, people, information, decision-making, leadership, and market experience.

The first contribution, "An Efficient Loan Default Risk Assessment Framework Using TPE-Optimized CatBoost Model" by Baidyanath Sou, examines financial risk assessment through advanced machine-learning techniques. The study develops a CatBoost-based framework optimized using a Tree-Structured Parzen Estimator (TPE) and evaluates its performance across three benchmark datasets. The findings indicate the potential of the optimized model to improve credit-risk classification, probability estimation, and risk differentiation, particularly in datasets characterized by class imbalance. By focusing on data-driven credit-risk assessment, this paper highlights the importance of analytical capability and technological intelligence in strengthening the resilience of financial decision-making and lending institutions.

The second paper, “Cognitive Job Demands and Employee Work Engagement: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion among Managerial Employees in Sri Lankan Apparel Firms” by K.K.H. Nanayakkara, brings the human dimension of resilience into focus. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources theory, the study examines how cognitive job demands influence employee work engagement through emotional exhaustion among managerial employees in Sri Lanka's export-oriented apparel sector. Based on data from 758 managerial employees across 45 firms, the study demonstrates the significant relationships among cognitive demands, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement. The paper reminds us that organizational resilience cannot be sustained through technology and strategic systems alone; it also depends on maintaining a workforce that is capable of remaining engaged and effective under demanding and turbulent conditions.

The third contribution, “Digital Supply Chain Traceability and Supply Chain Resilience in Sri Lankan Apparel Exporters: The Mediating Role of Operational Decision-Making Speed” by P.S.D. Punchihewa, addresses resilience from a supply-chain perspective. Using data from managerial and executive-level employees in Sri Lankan apparel exporting firms, the study examines digital supply chain traceability, operational decision-making speed, and supply chain resilience. The findings demonstrate positive relationships between digital traceability, decision-making speed, and resilience, while operational decision-making speed partially mediates the relationship between traceability and resilience. Importantly, the study illustrates that the value of digital technology extends beyond information visibility: its strategic value is realized when information can be translated into timely managerial action.

The fourth paper, “Enhancing Tea Tourism Destination Image through Digital Marketing: The Mediating Role of Visitor Experience in Sri Lanka” by K.C.M.N. De Silva, P.I.N. Fernando, and G.H.V. Harshani, extends the discussion of strategic adaptation to the tourism sector. Through a mixed-method approach involving 382 foreign tea tourists and 12 tea tourism stakeholders, the study investigates the relationship between digital marketing, visitor experience, and tea tourism destination image. The findings reveal that digital marketing tools significantly enhance visitor experience, but do not have a significant direct effect on destination image. Instead, visitor experience plays a significant mediating role. The qualitative evidence further points to fragmented promotional practices, limited adoption of immersive technologies, and inadequate stakeholder collaboration. The study therefore emphasizes the importance of moving beyond digital visibility towards meaningful, experience-oriented digital engagement.

The fifth contribution, “A Framework for Building Resilience with Adaptive Leadership and AI Readiness in Contemporary South Asian Organizations” by Yohan Perera and Sachin Carlton, takes a broader conceptual perspective on organizational resilience in the era of artificial intelligence. Based on an integrative review, the authors propose a framework linking leadership, AI readiness, and organizational resilience. The paper argues that the adoption of AI alone does not automatically create resilience. Rather, organizations require the appropriate internal capabilities, employee preparedness, leadership support, and organizational conditions to translate technological potential into adaptive capacity. By positioning AI readiness as a mechanism through which leadership can contribute to resilience, the paper provides a useful conceptual lens for understanding technology-enabled adaptation in turbulent South Asian environments.

Taken together, these five papers provide a rich and multidimensional understanding of the central theme of this Special Issue. They demonstrate that resilience and strategic agility can be examined at multiple levels: financial decision-making, employees and managerial capability, supply chains, tourism destinations, and organizational leadership and technology readiness. The collection also illustrates the increasing intersection between traditional management concerns and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital traceability.

Another notable feature of this Special Issue is its strong connection with the South Asian context. Rather than treating turbulence as an abstract global phenomenon, the contributions provide insights from contexts such as Sri Lanka and India, addressing industries and organizations that operate under distinctive economic, technological, institutional, and market conditions. Such context-sensitive research is particularly valuable because management practices and organizational capabilities cannot always be understood independently of the environments in which organizations operate.

The publication of this Special Issue would not have been possible without the commitment and scholarly leadership of our Guest Editor, Prof. Thilini C. Gamage, Professor in Marketing, Department of Marketing Management, Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka. On behalf of the South Asian Journal of Business Insights, I extend my sincere appreciation to Prof. Gamage for her valuable contribution, academic guidance, and commitment to maintaining the scholarly quality of this Special Issue.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the Editorial Board for their continued support, academic judgment, and commitment to the development of SAJBI. My appreciation is equally extended to all the reviewers who generously contributed their time, expertise, and constructive comments to strengthen the manuscripts included in this issue. The peer-review process remains one of the most important foundations of scholarly publishing, and the quality of an academic journal depends substantially on the dedication of scholars who contribute to this process.

Our sincere thanks also go to all the authors who submitted their work to this Special Issue. Their willingness to engage with the theme and contribute evidence, theoretical perspectives, and practical insights has enriched the intellectual content of SAJBI. We particularly appreciate the authors whose papers have been selected for publication and their cooperation throughout the editorial and revision process.

As we present this Special Issue, we hope that it will stimulate further scholarly discussion on how organizations in South Asia can develop the capabilities required not merely to withstand turbulence, but to adapt, innovate, learn, and create opportunities amid uncertainty. We also hope that the contributions will encourage future research that connects resilience and strategic agility with emerging technologies, human capabilities, sustainable business practices, entrepreneurship, and institutional transformation.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who continue to support the development of the South Asian Journal of Business Insights. As an academic journal emerging from the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna, SAJBI remains committed to providing a

platform for meaningful, contextually relevant, and methodologically rigorous research that contributes to business and management knowledge in South Asia and beyond.

We are pleased to share this Special Issue with our readers and look forward to its contribution to ongoing academic and professional conversations on business resilience, strategic agility, and organizational adaptation in turbulent economies.

Dr. E.K. Jayampathi
Editor-in-Chief
South Asian Journal of Business Insights