The Future Of Banking

An Interview with Dr. Shanu S.P. Hinduja, Chair, S.P. Hinduja Banque Privée

Shanu S.P. Hinduja

EDITORS' NOTE *Dr. Shanu S.P. Hinduja is a trailblazing career banker and Chair of S.P. Hinduja Banque Privée, where she leads with a clear vision for a more inclusive and accountable financial system. A pioneering woman at the helm of a Swiss bank, she has dedicated her life to empowering minorities and transforming finance into a transparent, meritocratic, and human-centered system. As Co-Chair of the United Nations Global Accelerator, she champions finance as a catalyst for inclusion and opportunity, using her platform to empower underrepresented communities. She has shared global stages as a powerful voice on leadership, equality, and the future of the world economy, bringing together entrepreneurs, policymakers, and communities to address the urgent social and economic challenges of our time. Her work in finance is complemented by her passion for intuitive abstract expressionism, a practice guided by flow, intuition, connection, and emotion. Through this artistic lens, she explores the unseen currents that shape human experience, deepening her empathetic approach to leadership and reaffirming her belief that both art and banking are, at their core, acts of understanding and the pursuit of meaningful impact.*

Will you discuss your career journey?

I have often felt that the universe placed me as my father's first child not by chance, but to help shape a future where women's voices lead to change.

My career journey began when I was just eight or nine years old, sitting quietly in my father's office every Saturday. I wasn't given tasks or instructions; I simply observed – listening to conversations, absorbing how decisions were made, and learning that business is ultimately about people, relationships, and trust. Those early mornings shaped the foundation of my worldview far more deeply than any formal lesson could. Observation became my first form of education, and understanding human behavior became my earliest skill.

By my teenage years, this curiosity evolved into hands-on experience. I completed my first internship at 14 and later trained at firms such as Nomura, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley, where I learned the technical craft of portfolio management and asset allocation. Yet the most transformative learning still happened outside classrooms – through travel, exposure to boardrooms, high-level dinners, and witnessing how complex relationships are navigated. At 19, building and managing a $50,000 portfolio with a stockbroker loan – and successfully repaying it – gave me my first sense of real responsibility and earned my father's trust to manage some of his own portfolios.

As my life unfolded, my path took turns that enriched my leadership perspective beyond finance alone. Writing a book and navigating personal challenges in my 30s and 40s taught me resilience, adaptability, and the emotional dimensions of leadership. In parallel, I deepened my long-standing commitment to philanthropy, becoming a founding member of the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and supporting the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These experiences reinforced a conviction that business, society, and the environment are interconnected – and that leadership carries obligations beyond profit.

A renewed commitment to formal education followed. Armed with an earlier finance and accounting degree from London, I completed executive certificates in global management, finance, and luxury at INSEAD. In 2013, I joined the Hinduja Foundation's board and helped build scholarship initiatives at leading institutions including Columbia University, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Cambridge. That same year, I joined S.P. Hinduja Banque Privée and eventually became Chair in 2018 – stepping into a Swiss banking sector where few women lead institutions, choosing to demonstrate capability through action rather than assertion.

Over time, my work naturally expanded into global dialogue and thought leadership – addressing the UN General Assembly on disability inclusion, co-chairing the UN Global Accelerator, participating at Davos, contributing to the World Economic Forum, and writing for global publications. Teaching leadership and speaking internationally emerged as extensions of a lifelong pattern: learning through observation, integrating diverse experiences, and serving with intention.

Shanu Hinduja's parents, S.P. and Madhu Srichand Hinduja

Shanu Hinduja with her sister, Vinoo Hinduja

My sister, Vinoo, with her steady judgement, integrity, and calm authority has excelled as a woman of great strength and perseverance. Together, we continue to build on what my father created, united in our mission to keep his legacy alive, relevant, and prospering for generations to come. Working alongside my daughter, Lavanya, and my son, Karam, has become one of the most defining parts of this chapter of my life. Each of them brings a different strength to the table – my daughter with her forward-looking vision and natural ability to inspire, my son with his strategic clarity and entrepreneurial drive. There is a special kind of momentum that comes from building with those who know you fully and still challenge you to grow.

Looking back, my journey has been a weaving together of finance, philanthropy, education, and public engagement – guided by the belief that leadership is ultimately service, and that the most meaningful progress comes from listening, learning, and acting with purpose.

Ultimately, the legacy I hope to leave is one that empowers others with the tools and support to shape a more equitable and humane world.

What are your views on the critical role that banks play for successful societies and for people to prosper?

Banks play a critical role in helping societies succeed and people prosper because they are engines of growth, inclusion, and stability. They fuel entrepreneurship, infrastructure, innovation, and job creation by providing credit and financial services to the real economy. By financing small- and medium-sized enterprises, housing, and trade, they accelerate wealth creation and broaden opportunities across society. They are also resilient shock absorbers in times of crisis, with strong capital, liquidity buffers, and prudent risk management helping to stabilize economies when it matters most.

When supported by smart, efficient regulation and when profits are sustainably reinvested in growth, banks can simultaneously deliver long-term value for shareholders, expand opportunity and inclusion, and underpin broader social and economic progress.

How can banks balance commercial competitiveness with the responsibility to promote financial stability and inclusion?

Banks balance commercial competitiveness with their responsibility for stability and inclusion by making responsibility a driver of long-term performance rather than a constraint. Competitiveness and responsibility go hand in hand when banks offer affordable accounts, microcredit, and digital payment solutions that help communities thrive and, at the same time, create new markets. Public authorities can reinforce this by incentivizing banks to serve rural, low-income, and marginalized groups, as seen during COVID when policy support enabled inclusive lending while preserving overall financial stability.

Global evidence shows that digital financial services and microfinance can significantly expand access for underserved communities while still being commercially viable, especially for women and small businesses.

Smarter regulation is central to this balance: frameworks should target bad actors and systemic risks, while allowing honest clients and banks to flourish and avoiding excessive compliance that overwhelms ordinary customers and erodes trust. In parallel, banks must systematically build resilience against cyber threats, money laundering, climate risks, and other systemic vulnerabilities, so that strong risk management underpins both commercial strength and their wider role in supporting financial stability and inclusion.

Is the banking industry effectively addressing and building resilience against systematic risks, such as cyber threats, money laundering, and climate risks?

Supervisors and industry bodies now explicitly treat cyber risks, financial crime, and climate risks as core prudential issues, but the implementation remains uneven across markets. Cybersecurity now underpins almost every interaction people have with their bank, and the financial and reputational damage from cyber incidents has become one of the costliest risks our sector faces. Therefore, banks are strengthening capital, liquidity, and risk frameworks, and working with regulators to address these vulnerabilities more systematically, yet policy makers still have a crucial role in designing rules that are effective for stability without overburdening clients. The balance between robust safeguards and practical implementation is still being worked out. Progress is steady, but it would be premature to claim that the sector has truly reached the level of resilience that is ultimately needed.

Shanu Hinduja with her son Karam Srichand Hinduja and her daughter Lavanya Srichand Hinduja

Shanu Hinduja being interviewed by CNBC Arabia anchor Hussein Sayed on the role of banks in society

What are your views on the current regulatory environment for the banking industry?

An effective regulatory environment has always been central to how banks can serve society, and over the years I have seen how the best regulation is not about adding complexity, but about creating clarity and trust. When rules are thoughtfully designed – anchored in transparency, proportionality, and purpose – they empower banks to support growth, inclusion, and innovation. Regulation should never feel like a barrier; at its best, it is an enabling force that protects the integrity of the system while allowing good actors to thrive.

Around the world, I have observed jurisdictions where regulators and industry leaders work closely together, building frameworks that are practical, forward-looking, and aligned with economic development. When this partnership is strong, outcomes are strong. Banks can lend more confidently, clients experience fewer unnecessary burdens, and financial ecosystems become more resilient. Smart regulation doesn't stifle; it guides – ensuring that rules target real risks such as misconduct, systemic vulnerabilities, and emerging threats, rather than overwhelming ordinary customers with excessive procedures.

The industry today faces challenges that simply did not exist a decade ago: cyber risk, climate-related exposures, sophisticated financial crime, and the accelerating pace of technological change. These realities require regulatory frameworks that evolve just as quickly. Stability and innovation must sit side by side. Banks need room to adopt new tools, digital processes, and AI-driven solutions, but this freedom must be matched with strong safeguards that protect individuals, markets, and the broader financial system.

Ultimately, I believe what is needed is not more regulation, but smarter regulation – rules that are dynamic rather than static, principles-based rather than prescriptive, and rooted in a shared ambition to build a financial sector that is stable, inclusive, and competitive. When banks and policymakers collaborate with openness and purpose, regulation becomes not an administrative obligation, but a cornerstone of long-term societal progress.

Will you discuss the importance for banks to leverage digital transformation and AI without losing the human touch and personal relationships?

Banks absolutely must leverage digital transformation and AI, but not at the expense of human relationships, especially when clients are trusting them with their life savings. From a personal point of view, going fully digital is not desirable because many clients, particularly in certain age groups, still value and even rely on the human touch. They want to interact with a real person, not a machine, and that sense of personal connection remains fundamental when dealing with money and long-term financial decisions. At the same time, even beyond age, there is a broader concern about simply "handing everything over to machines," which is not something to be fully endorsed in my opinion.

Digital tools and AI can clearly enhance efficiency, for example, reducing processes such as mortgage approvals from days to hours, but technology should support personal banking relationships, not replace them. Clients value engagement, whether it is digital, in person, or a blend of both, so the objective should be to combine convenience with genuine human interaction. To do this responsibly, banks must also invest heavily in cyber resilience and robust security systems because deeper digitalization inevitably increases exposure to cyber threats and other systemic risks; in parallel, maintaining reliable documentation and backups remains important to safeguard trust and continuity.

As a woman leader in the banking industry, what do you tell young women about the opportunities that the industry offers?

As a woman leader in banking, the first thing I would say to young women is that this industry offers a powerful opportunity to enter the system and help other women achieve financial stability. It has historically been a very male dominated and biased sector, but it is slowly changing, and the more women who join, the more balance, perspective, and guidance the sector will offer to the wider female population.

When women understand financial products, schemes, and risks better, they can design and access opportunities that support women as housewives, entrepreneurs, professionals, mothers, strengthening resilience across families and communities. At the same time, the industry is demanding: women need to "wear a cloak of iron" and come in prepared to own the space, the title, and the responsibility because banking can be tough and requires extra strength and stamina.

Yet that is precisely why women are needed in finance. Their perspectives, values, and even emotions can contribute to wiser, more balanced decisions, which is essential in an industry that underpins economic growth, inclusion, and long term stability.

Global initiatives and peer networks for women in financial services are growing, which should make the path less lonely and less "armored" for the next generation.

Do you believe cryptocurrencies pose a threat to the traditional banking industry?

Technology has always reshaped financial services, and it will continue to sit at the center of how people save, invest, and transact. Cryptocurrencies are a natural extension of this evolution. They represent a global appetite for alternative ways of managing money – more digital, more decentralized, and in many cases more autonomous. Whether one views them as disruptive or innovative, the reality is that they are here to stay, and the financial sector must adapt rather than resist.

At the same time, cryptocurrencies are still maturing. Their volatility, fragmented infrastructure, and uneven global adoption mean they cannot yet serve as stable stores of value or fully reliable mediums of exchange. Moreover, this market remains under regulated, and both clients and banks face distinctive risks – from sharp price swings that can undermine asset values to market fluctuations that ripple across other currencies and financial instruments. This is not a reason to dismiss them; rather, it is a signal that policy, regulation, and the broader financial architecture must evolve alongside the technology. Just as traditional banking frameworks were built over decades, digital assets now require thoughtful, modern safeguards – rules that protect consumers, ensure market integrity, and reduce systemic risk without stifling innovation. For that progress to occur responsibly, education will be essential. Users need to understand what they are investing in, how these products function, and what risks they carry. Likewise, custodians – banks, brokers, digital platforms, and emerging fintech players – must be equipped with the knowledge, systems, and ethical frameworks to manage digital assets securely. Without this shared understanding, the gap between technological possibility and practical stability will only widen.

In many ways, cryptocurrencies challenge the financial world to grow. They push banks, regulators, and policymakers to modernize infrastructure, rethink long-standing assumptions, and strengthen the bridge between traditional systems and digital innovation. If approached with foresight, collaboration, and education, this evolution need not threaten banking – it can instead expand the possibilities of what a resilient, inclusive, and technology-enabled financial system can become. The key is to evolve while managing, mitigating and overcoming the technological risks. ●