

**CHRIST**(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
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Notice for the PhD Viva Voce Examination

Ms Lalrengpuii, Registration Number: 2090012, PhD Scholar at the Department of Commerce, School of Commerce, Finance and Accountancy, CHRIST (Deemed to be University) will defend her PhD thesis at the public viva-voce examination on Wednesday, 08 April 2026 at 03.00 pm in Room No. 736, 7th Floor, R&D Block, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru - 560029, Karnataka, India.

Title of the Thesis	:	The Impact of Virtual Influencers' Attributes on Gen Z
Discipline	:	Commerce
External Examiner - I	:	Dr Biju T Professor and Head Department of Commerce University of Kerala Karyavattom Campus Thiruvananthapuram – 695581 Kerala
External Examiner - II	:	Dr Manjit Singh Professor School of Applied Management Punjabi University Patiala – 147002 Punjab
Supervisor	:	Dr Lijeesh P Assistant Professor Department of Commerce School of Commerce, Finance and Accountancy CHRIST (Deemed to be University) Bengaluru - 560029 Karnataka

The members of the Research Advisory Committee of the Scholar, the faculty members of the Department and the School, interested experts and research scholars of all the branches of research are cordially invited to attend this open viva-voce examination.

Place: Bengaluru
Date: 27 March 2026

Registrar (Academics)

ABSTRACT

This study, grounded in S-O-R framework and informed by Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory, investigates five key attributes of virtual influencers: trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, similarity, and anthropomorphism. A quantitative research design was implemented, utilising data gathered through a cross-sectional survey of 723 Gen Z Instagram users aged 18-27 in India. The data analysis employed PLS-SEM to explore both direct and mediating relationships. At the same time, NCA assessed whether parasocial interaction serves as a prerequisite for favourable consumer outcomes. The results showed that virtual influencers significantly affect Gen Z-consumers' behaviour adoption, purchase-intentions and engagement levels, using multiple mediating mechanisms. Parasocial interaction was identified as one of these mechanisms, and therefore it is an important factor for developing digital relationships with customers. Perceived similarity and anthropomorphism are found to be the most influential factors on parasocial interaction and consequent behaviours and indicate that people tend to develop a relationship with AI endorsed products if they are designed to look like humans. Additionally, trustworthiness and expertise were shown to have positive effects on consumer reactions; this indicates that credibility is crucial when in AI endorsement. This study advances existing knowledge of influence marketing by applying traditional persuasion-theories to digital generated personas. This study provides insights for marketers targeting digitally aware Gen Z customers in India and other emerging economies.

Keywords: Gen Z, credibility, similarity, anthropomorphism, parasocial interaction.

Publications:

1. **Lalrengpuii**, Srivastava, M. K., & Belavandran, V. (2024). Trends in virtual influencers (VIs): A bibliometric analysis and SPAR-4-SLR protocol. *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, 7(12), 2024285. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2024285>
2. **Lalrengpuii**, & Pullot, L. (2025). Attributes of virtual influencers: Science mapping and future agenda. *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, 9(7), 2026370. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2026370>