

Colloidal gold nanosphere dispersions in smectic liquid crystals and thin nanoparticle-decorated smectic films

R. Pratibha,^{1,2,3} W. Park,² and I. I. Smalyukh^{1,4,5,a)}

¹*Department of Physics, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309, USA*

²*Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309, USA*

³*Raman Research Institute, C.V. Raman Avenue, Bangalore 560080, India*

⁴*Liquid Crystal Materials Research Center, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309, USA*

⁵*Renewable and Sustainable Energy Institute, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309, USA*

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We demonstrate that the layer structure and elasticity stabilize dispersions of colloidal nanoparticles in smectic liquid crystals. We use surface plasmon resonance spectra of gold nanospheres to probe their spatial distributions in the bulk of smectic lamellae. The average interparticle distances between the well-separated nanoinclusions in thin (<100 nm) smectic films are probed by atomic force microscopy. We show that limited motion of nanoparticles across layers due to the one-dimensional quasi-long-range solid-like structure and their elasticity-mediated interactions preclude irreversible aggregation and enhance the stability of the ensuing nanoscale dispersions in thermotropic smectic liquid crystals. © 2010 American Institute of Physics.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Dispersions of colloidal particles in anisotropic liquid crystalline media are interesting from both fundamental physics and technological applications standpoints. Studies of colloidal microparticles in nematic¹⁻⁵ and smectic⁶⁻¹¹ liquid crystals (LCs) reveal strongly anisotropic long-range interactions that can be of both attractive and repulsive nature.² The interactions depend on topological defects and *director* structures occurring around the particles and are mediated by orientational elasticity of the surrounding LC medium. In the case of micron-sized inclusions embe-9 R5nclusion2(nclusion1)322.998clusion2LC,8(nature11.64259.842fectcle)36ar.842fec1s)270.42fecn

(Φ) of GNPs, the suspension of the PVP coated GNPs in ethyl alcohol was mixed with the LC in the smectic A phase and the mixture was continuously stirred for about 5 h. For the optical absorption studies most of the ethyl alcohol was evaporated and the mixture filled into cells made of rubbed glass plates with thin polyimide alignment coatings. The remaining alcohol was allowed to evaporate over a few hours. Well-aligned smectic A samples with the *director* along the rubbing direction were obtained. The absorption spectra in the smectic A phase (at $\sim 25^\circ\text{C}$) were obtained using the Ocean Optics quantum beam optical spectrometer (QB-500) calibrated with a photometric microscope Olympus BX (Tokyo Japan). For the AFM studies the texture of the coated GNPs in ethyl alcohol and LC was continuously stirred for 5 h and was spin coated at 3000 rpm on a silicon substrate. The surface morphology was studied using Nanoscope III AFM (from Digital Instruments) in the tapping mode. To measure the average thickness of the selected surface supported

the surface profile shows the defect-induced depressions in the case of pure CB [Fig. (f)] and the raised bumps due to particle-induced layer deformations in the case of the LC-GN dispersions [Fig. (g)]. In the schematic illustration, a DSD that possesses a quasi-random translational order in the direction perpendicular to layers is shown. As probed by AFM, the profile of the top surface layer in the DSD is shown. The apparent variation in the height of individual bumps can be due to polydispersity of particle sizes (transmission electron microscopy data show that particle diameters vary from 10 to 20 nm with an average size of ~ 15 nm) for formation of dislocation loops of different

spherical dispersions in isotropic fluids of great fundamental interest to explore the feasibility of achieving ordered periodic self-assembly of nanoparticles and spatial structures composed of nanoparticles and particle-free structures in a liquid crystal (LC).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we have demonstrated the enhanced colloidal stability of spherical LC nanoparticle dispersions as compared to those in neat solvents. In experimental and computer simulated spectra, we have shown that the interparticle separations between isolated silica nanoparticles in the bulk of spherical silica are nearly the same even for highly concentrated suspensions. Nanoparticles in the bulk do not aggregate but rather modify the free surface profile of the droplet due to layer distortions around the inclusions in the LC bulk. The nanoscale dispersions are of interest for technologies that require composite construction of nanoparticles and dielectric materials with tunable properties and interparticle distances which may provide means of spatial structure