Democratic Participant Media Theory is the latest in the field of media theories, and Professor Denis McQuail is its proponent. Its location is mainly in rich, developed countries where the citizens have the scientific, technological and financial means to put the latest innovations in inter-personal communication to practical and regular use.

It is by no means confined to the rich developed countries because science and technology is universal; all countries can make use of them provided there is a will to do so, particularly among the financially well-off sector. Cyber systems are prevalent everywhere and India is no exception. From the early 1990s, or at least from mid-1990s, the Internet is part of India’s media and communication system.

For a while advanced countries in the West witnessed citizens’ apathy towards democratic politics, especially at the time of periodic elections in the 1970s and 1980s. Their voting behavior changed and this was reflected in the low percentage in voter-turnout. Political scientists found an explanation for this alteration in voter-behaviour. It was concluded that citizens’ apathy was caused by their conviction that not many things could be changed by voting once in five years or so. The government establishment and the political system appeared immutable.

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The democratic participant theory is, in a way, the technological version of the libertarian theory. People can and must express their views freely, exchange ideas without fear, and with absolute freedom, making use of innovations in technology. The Internet came in handy, and with it came the interpersonal device of electronic mail (e-mail), without any central authority to control it.

The theory challenges commercialization and monopolization of privately-owned media; it reacts against the centralism and bureaucratization of media institutions, as pointed out by McQuail. It emphasizes communitarianism, and encourages citizens’ participation in community affairs, The dominance of mainstream mass media owned by private or public monopolies was the reason behind the emergence of “underground” publications during the 1960s and 1970s, The alternative media were technically made more efficient with the arrival of the Internet.

Underlying the theory under discussion is the assumption that mass communication need not be “uniform, centralized, high-cost, commercialized, professionalized, state controlled or privately controlled. Mass communication can take place without the mass media.

In fact, this is what happened in Egypt, Tunisia and other Arab countries where people organized protests and popular movements against authoritarian regimes. This is what can enthuse people to clamour for more freedom, and accountability from ruling governments. Properly directed, such movements are desirable in all States under repressive governments. The new media can come to the aid of citizens wanting more political and social freedom, and personal expression of freedom for desirable action for the welfare and safety of citizens.

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“Mass communication can be multiple, small-scale, local, non-institutional, run by small communities (or even individuals?) having similar aims and goals “Not only newspapers, but radio, ham radio, mobile phones, smart phones and all devices that can be used conveniently by the ordinary citizens can effectively apply this theory of participation in democracy, without interference from government. Since technology is now available to all informed groups and persons even in poor countries, the New Media including wall newspapers, bro-adsheets with jumbo-size messages printed in big fonts, wall posters similarly printed, little ma-gazines, etc., can serve the pu-rpose. The neo-literate millions in China and India can benefit from this unconventional journalism.

Local issues can be more effectively handled by local media, particularly interactive media where and when available and a revolution of some sort in communication in socioeconomic, political and cultural matters can be achieved in poor countries. Panchaayats and municipal towns can benefit from such novel methods of communication for people’s mobilization and active participaton.

But will the existing power centres permit such free expression through the Internet and other new devices? The fight to uphold the right to free expression is inevitable. Communication is too important to be left either to private manipulators or bureaucrats. Citizens must be free to express opinions without government or private interference or surveillance, provided norms of personal, social and national safety and security are not jeopardized.