The camera and the citizen journalist – a force for good?
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In the early 20th Century, the influential Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy made the prediction that 'it is not the person ignorant of writing but the one ignorant of photography who will be the illiterate of the future', whilst Walter Benjamin envisaged that the readers of the newspaper would one-day become its authors, reporters and photojournalists. Given the development of technology and the ability of individual citizens to become a 'reporter', to what extent do the above statements hold true? Does the citizen journalist knowingly hold the power to influence and affect political and legal change?

This paper will explore the ways in which the ordinary, everyday person has the power firstly to challenge the traditional conception of what a journalist is, and secondly to drive political and social change through the taking and sharing of images via social media. The impact this has upon the traditional media and the consequent reliance on citizen material add an interesting dynamic to this relationship. Citizens are often first on the scene, photographing events from celebrations to disasters, but are not subject to the same safeguards applicable to the traditional media. This can have severe implications for the subjects of the photographs – for example, invasions of privacy. Through use of the example of the Shoreham Air Crash, these difficulties and ethical issues will be explored, including a consideration of whether safeguards are necessary to protect all parties involved.

In the current environment, do we, as the public, have a right to know everything that is happening in the world around us? If so, does the crucial democratic "right" and ability to contribute to the "clash of ideas" outweigh all other considerations? Has the advent of the citizen journalist signalled the arrival of a "right to know", or would always being able to access and know the truth ultimately be more harmful to society?