

**From Manhattan to St. Louis:  
The Political Roles of Talking Points Memo & Gateway Pundit**

As their names suggest, Talking Points Memo (TPM) and Gateway Pundit (Gateway) diverge not only in their political leanings, but also in their political roles and effectiveness. The liberal TPM originates from the endeavors of Josh Marshall to cover the Florida recount in November 2000.<sup>1</sup> Named after a phrase made famous by the Monica Lewinsky scandal, TPM has evolved into an influential team of seven reporters plus Marshall that compiles and analyzes news from the main stream media (MSM), serves as informants, and muckrakes.<sup>2</sup> Many miles away from TPM's Manhattan headquarters, Gateway Pundit's founder and sole blogger, Jim Hoft, began reporting in October 2004. Hoft stays true to his conservative perspective, and though he has expanded beyond his aim to focus on compiling and collecting news from the MSM, Gateway's local focus and manpower limit its roles and effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

Like all wisebots, TPM serves an external political role as compiler and analyst of political information. Josh Marshall and David Kurtz collect and collate stories from the MSM and other blogs into a carefully crafted left-leaning overview of recent news. Posts such as a clip of Obama's Camp Lejeune speech announcing his plan to withdraw US troops from Iraq by August 2010 cover the promises of the Obama administration.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, posts on the "tangled web" that Bobby Jindal has been spinning with the Katrina story he told Congress on February 24, 2009 discuss the shortcomings of Republicans.<sup>5</sup> Marshall also often criticizes the MSM with analyses that overcome traditional definitions of expertise. Despite his training as an American history scholar, Marshall offers commentary the intersection of economics and politics through his post, "100<sup>th</sup> Time on Nationalization."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the "my TPM" feature of TPM Café takes Perlmutter's advice on the importance of employing blog readers to heart.<sup>7</sup> This community tool allows readers to blog, discuss, and gain a following.<sup>8</sup> The TPM team also serves as an "interactor" through crowd-sourcing efforts that aim to construct expertise on issues.<sup>9</sup> For example, the post, "TPM Readers

Needed for Black Ops Work,” calls on readers to scour recently released documents for story ideas on how former CIA No. 3, Dusty Foggo, used CIA resources to help Brent Wilkes.<sup>10</sup>

TPM’s role as political watchdog was publicly acclaimed when it was the first blog to receive the prestigious George Polk Award for Legal Reporting in 2008 for its coverage of the US attorney scandal. The Long Island University announcement of the award partially attributes Attorney General Alberto Gonzales’s resignation to “Marshall’s tenacious investigative reporting.”<sup>11</sup> Marshall continues to play government overseer by pointing out instances when Washington withholds the complete story from the public. In his February 27, 2009 post, “Wake Me Up When...,” Marshall calls on the government to provide a “major economic indicator that the economic forecasters hadn’t assumed would be better than it turned out to be.”<sup>12</sup> Kurtz also provides a link to a TPM Café post by vice president of policy affairs at the Century Foundation, Greg Anrig, who points out calculation errors in an *Atlantic* post that deceptively suggest that Social Security will increase national debt for the next ten years.<sup>13</sup>

TPM’s distinguishing features include its roles as Washington D.C. correspondent and investigative reporter. TPM DC provides first-hand coverage of speeches and events such as the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).<sup>14</sup> TPM reporter, Eric Kleefeld covers Norm Coleman’s refusal to concede his loss in the November 2008 Minnesota Senate elections with interviews of politicians such as Dean Barkley and analyses on the evolving situation in D.C.<sup>15</sup> Kleefeld’s coverage of the election also serves the role of political watchdog because the story “seems to be flying below the national political radar,” according to Kurtz.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the TPM DC motto, “In it, not of it,” reflects Perlmutter’s claim that bloggers are proud to be distinct from the corrupt world of politics and the MSM.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, TPM Muckraker promotes investigative reporting with “Daily Muck” posts and other posts, such as a sneak preview of George Will’s latest column on global climate

change. TPM Muckraker is currently covering Bobby Jindal's twist on his role in tearing down the red tape during Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. TPM not only analyzed reports by other news sources, but reporters called Jindal's office to verify facts (though they did not get a response).<sup>18</sup> After reporting that Jindal's speech stretched the truth based on a *Times-Picayune* article, TPM pointed to a YouTube video found by a TPM reader that shows Jindal telling a similar story "with even more embroidery about his own part in the drama" last year.<sup>19</sup>

Like TPM, Hoft's Gateway Pundit collects and criticizes stories from the MSM and other blogs. With posts such as "Jewish Leaders Stunned by Hillary's Attacks on Israel," Gateway approaches the political media through a conservative lens. Nevertheless, as Perlmutter says, a clear bias "simply puts the information into perspective for the public," and benefits both those who agree and disagree.<sup>20</sup> Reflective of this bias, Gateway's coverage of the CPAC only consists of a speech by House Minority Leader, John Boehner, claiming that the Democrats are taking the first steps toward socialism.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Gateway reviews Jindal's speech as "fantastic," and writes, "Don't allow the left to slander Bobby Jindal. Help get the truth out!"<sup>22</sup>

Gateway does not provide first-hand accounts of events, most likely because Hoft is the site's sole blogger; but, it does provide extensive coverage of local events that have been overlooked by the MSM. For instance, links to reports by radio talk shows, Twitterers, and other conservative blogs such as Michelle Malkin discuss the recent St. Louis Arch Tea Party, an "anti-Spendulus" rally. A local TV Channel, KMOV TV, announced the Tea Party, but the local major daily newspaper, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, ignored it. Hoft also frequently reports on other local issues, such as Missouri Democratic Governor Jay Nixon's support for the stimulus package and Illinois Senator Roland Burris's role in the Blagojevich scandal.<sup>23</sup>

Hoft always keeps an eye out for errors by the *New York Times*, reporting stories such as "NY Times Leaks Classified Military Information ... Again."<sup>24</sup> In fact, *Newsweeks's* blog, the

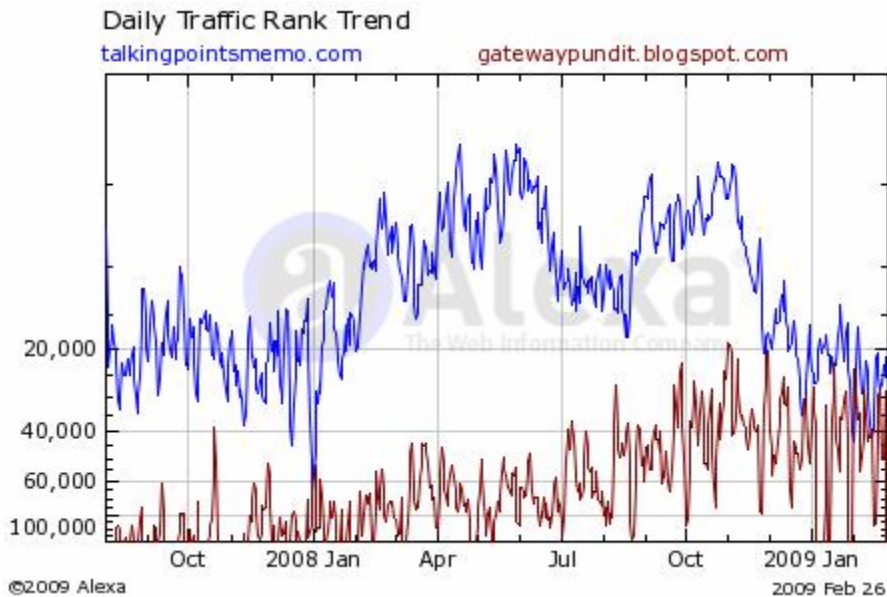
Ruckus, reports that Hoft was one of the bloggers to reveal inaccuracies in the MSM during the 33 Day War between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, thereby forcing the *Times* to make a correction.<sup>25</sup> Gateway also plays the role of government watchdog when it points to the Department of Education's few billion dollars error in their budget calculation.<sup>26</sup>

Though the Personal Democracy Forum ranks Gateway as the 8<sup>th</sup> top conservative blog and TPM as the 6<sup>th</sup> best liberal blog, an analysis of the number of blogs linking to the sites, web traffic, and quantity and quality of comments tells a different story. As of February 28, 2009, Technorati ranks TPM 31<sup>st</sup> overall with an authority of 5,287, while Gateway does not make the top 100 blogs with an authority of only 2,119. Technorati authority reflects the number of blogs that have linked to the website in the past six months. As shown in the graph in the appendix, Alexa reports that daily web traffic for TPM has historically been greater than that of Gateway, but that traffic for the two sites is converging around 40,000 daily views. Alexa counts multiple requests for the same URL by the same user on the same day as one view.<sup>27</sup> When asked about TPM's declining traffic, Marshall cites Alexa's numbers as "notoriously inaccurate," and claims that TPM web traffic is increasing.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, TPM's sites could benefit from more organization. For instance, it would be valuable to organize posts by issue on all four websites (currently only done on TPM Muckraker), and to allow searches with issue and date limitations.

Given Gateway's lower traffic, it expectedly draws fewer comments than TPM. Moreover, while the quality of comments on the main TPM blogs matches the quality of Gateway comments, TPM Café provides a forum for readers to make more substantive posts, such as "Repeating Rwanda: The Consequences of Euphemizing Genocide."<sup>29</sup> TPM's use of reader input and TPM Café also allow TPM to cultivate more mass commilito than Gateway.<sup>30</sup> Though Hoft may not be able to upgrade his blog's technology because of financial constraints, Gateway's growth could be stimulated by encouraging more reader participation and interaction.

## Appendix:

Figure 1. Daily Web Traffic from Alexa.com



(<http://www.alexacom/>)

<sup>1</sup> Talking Points Memo, "About TPM Media," <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/about.php> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Noam Cohen, "Blogger Sans Pajamas Rakes Muck and a Prize," *The New York Times*, 28 February 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/25/business/media/25marshall.html?\\_r=2&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&ref=business&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1235840408-48D5Dts3kHR05/XkA9tBsQ](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/25/business/media/25marshall.html?_r=2&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&ref=business&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1235840408-48D5Dts3kHR05/XkA9tBsQ) (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Jim Hoft, "Welcome to Gateway Pundit," Gateway Pundit, 23 October 2004, [http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2004\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2004_10_01_archive.html) (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> David Kurtz, "The Beginning of the End," Talking Points Memo, 27 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/the\\_beginning\\_of\\_the\\_end.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/the_beginning_of_the_end.php) (accessed February 27, 2009); Josh Marshall, "Popular," Talking Points Memo, 23 February 2009, <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/popular.php> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> David Kurtz, "What a Tangled Web They Weave," Talking Points Memo, 27 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/what\\_a\\_tangled\\_web\\_they\\_weave.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/what_a_tangled_web_they_weave.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> John Marshall, "100<sup>th</sup> Time on Nationalization," 25 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/100th\\_time\\_on\\_nationalization.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/100th_time_on_nationalization.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> David D. Perlmutter, *Blog Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008), 131.

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- <sup>8</sup>Talking Points Memo Café, “Welcome to my TPM!” [http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/how\\_to\\_use\\_the\\_tpm\\_community\\_t.php](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/how_to_use_the_tpm_community_t.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> Perlmutter, 131.
- <sup>10</sup> David Kurtz, “TPM Readers Needed for Black Ops Work,” Talking Points Memo, 25 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/tpm\\_readers\\_needed\\_for\\_black\\_ops\\_work.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/tpm_readers_needed_for_black_ops_work.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>11</sup> Long Island University, “Long Island University Announces Winners of 2007 George Polk Awards,” <http://www.brooklyn.liu.edu/polk/press/2007.html> (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>12</sup> John Marshall, “Wake Me Up When ...” Talking Points Memo, 27 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/im\\_going\\_to\\_start\\_feeling.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/im_going_to_start_feeling.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>13</sup> David Kurtz, “Numbers Matter,” Talking Points Memo, 26 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/numbers\\_matter.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/numbers_matter.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>14</sup> Matthew Cooper, “Grover Norquist on Bush and CPAC,” Talking Points Memo, 27 February 2009, <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/02/grover-norquist-on-bush-and-cpac.php> (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>15</sup> Eric Kleefeld, “Independent Minnesota Senate Candidate: If There’s A Do-Over, I’ll Run – And I Might Win,” Talking Points Memo, 27 February 2009, <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/02/independent-minnesota-senate-candidate-if-theres-a-do-over-ill-run---and-i-might-win.php#more> (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>16</sup> David Kurtz, “Don’t Look Now, But...” Talking Points Memo, 26 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/dont\\_look\\_now\\_but.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/dont_look_now_but.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>17</sup> TPM DC, Talking Points Memo, <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/> (accessed February 27, 2009); Perlmutter, 126.
- <sup>18</sup> Zachary Roth, “Jindal’s Katrina Story: A Tall Tale?” Talking Points Memo, 26 February 2009, [http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/02/jindals\\_katrina\\_story\\_a\\_tall\\_tale.php](http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/02/jindals_katrina_story_a_tall_tale.php) (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>19</sup> Josh Marshall, “Drip, Drip, Drip ...” Talking Points Memo, 28 February 2009, [http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/drip\\_drip\\_drip\\_2.php](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2009/02/drip_drip_drip_2.php) (accessed February 28, 2009).
- <sup>20</sup> Perlmutter, 120.
- <sup>21</sup> Jim Hoft, “Boehner at CPAC: Democrats are Taking First Steps Toward Socialism (Video),” Gateway Pundit, 27 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2009/02/boehner-at-cpac-democrats-are-taking.html#links> (accessed February 27, 2009).
- <sup>22</sup> Jim Hoft, “Bobby Jindal Rocks: ‘We Believe Americans Can Do Anything,’” Gateway Pundit, 27 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2009/02/bobby-jindal-rocks-rebuttal.html#links> (accessed February 27, 2009); Jim Hoft, “VIDEO PROOF the Left is Lying About Bobby Jindal (Updated),” Gateway Pundit, 28 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2009/02/heres-video-proof-left-is-lying-about.html#links> (accessed February 28, 2009).
- <sup>23</sup> Jim Hoft, “Missouri Dem Governor is Not Worried About Cost of Stimulus ‘Missouri Kids & Grandkids Will Pay the Debt Off’ (Video),” Gateway Pundit, 24 February, 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/search?q=missouri+dem+governor+is+not+worried> (accessed February 27, 2009); Jim Hoft, “Blago Gave Buriss’ Deadbeat Son \$75,000 a Year State Job,” Gateway Pundit, 26 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/search?q=burris> (accessed February 27, 2009).

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<sup>24</sup>Jim Hoft, “*NY Times* Leaks Classified Military Information ... Again,” Gateway Pundit, 23 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/search?q=ny+times+leaks+classified+military+information> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> The Ruckus, “Jim Hoft: Gateway Pundit,” *Newsweek*, 3 September 2008, <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/theruckus/pages/jim-hoft-gateway-pundit.aspx> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Jim Hoft, “Oops!... Department of Education Miscalculates Budget by a Few Billion Dollars,” Gateway Pundit, 27 February 2009, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/search?q=oops!> (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Alexa, “Website Traffic Comparisons,” <http://www.alexa.com/> (accessed February 28, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> John Marshall, email to author, February 28, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Moggy, “Repeating Rwanda: The Consequences of Euphemizing Genocide,” Gateway Pundit, 3 March 2009, <http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/moggy/2009/03/repeating-rwanda-the-consequen.php> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Perlmutter, 154.