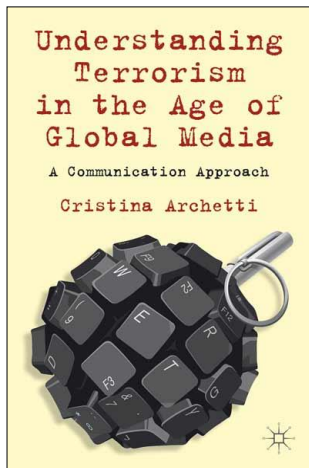Cristina Archetti, **Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach**, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 218 pp. $73.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
Philip Effiom Ephraim
Cross River University of Technology, Nigeria

The 21st century can be described as fast-paced, media-saturated, highly interconnected, and, sadly, an era of rising terrorism. The past 14 years have witnessed an increase in the number of new terrorist groups and the violent radicalization of previously religious extremists groups. Individual attacks by terrorists and their sympathizers have become more frequent. The memories of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris and the Sydney and Copenhagen attacks in just the first months of 2015 leave the world wondering what could happen next as terrorist ideologies transmitted locally are increasingly having global effects.

Terrorism has become a huge global issue. It is arguably the most reported subject in international news and the most debated in contemporary academic discourse. Terrorism has also become a grim reality that those of us living in the current age of globalization and interconnection need to fully understand and contend with. Author Cristina Archetti (2013) states that "we cannot truly understand terrorism in the twenty-first century, let alone counter it effectively, unless we also understand the communication processes that underpin it" (p. 1). Helping us understand terrorism from a communication perspective is what Archetti sets out to do in her book **Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach**.

Numerous definitions and conflicting narratives exist about what terrorism really is and who terrorists really are. While some view members of so-called terrorist groups as heroes fighting against religious subjugation and Western oppression, others view them as violent and extremist, ignorantly implementing the selfish agendas of their leaders. Archetti (2013) argues that the conflicting viewpoints and narratives on terrorism stem from communication. Terrorism itself is a form of communication, and it is inextricably linked to communication media.

Communication serves the interests both of terrorist groups and of those involved in counterterrorism by providing the media and networks for the transmission of various narratives. Archetti (2013) defines *narratives* as ideologies constructed and promoted in the form of messages from senders to audiences. These messages are decoded and inspire various forms of feedback from the audience. The author adds that terrorist groups are increasingly recognizing the power and effectiveness of new media technologies, especially social media such as YouTube and Twitter, as important platforms for transmitting their narratives to global audiences. She states that Al Qaeda was the first terrorist group to embrace new media. Beginning with laptops and DVDs, Al Qaeda soon migrated to cyberspace, setting an example for

other groups to follow. Terrorist groups increasingly use social media platforms to raise funds, network, coordinate international attacks, and gather information. Archetti terms this the "demonization of the Internet" (p. 40).

Archetti advocates for a brand management approach toward understanding and tackling terrorism. She states that terrorist groups can be likened to companies trying to promote their name and products in a competitive marketplace. In the case of terrorist groups, the branded products are extremist propaganda and radical ideologies packaged as messages and channeled through the media in order to attract public support and new members. Archetti uses the Al Qaeda narrative as a case study to illustrate her argument. She argues that just as big brand names can be countered and even and brought down through strategic communications, these strategies could also be applied to countering the Al Qaeda brand.

The author's main contribution to scholarship in terrorism and media research is her proposed model, which applies Jean-Noel Kapferer's identity prism to countering terrorist narratives. Archetti is of the opinion that the identity prism can be adopted as a framework to help in deconstructing terrorist narratives with a view to preventing further radicalization and recruitment of new members. The identity prism, borrowed from strategic marketing communication, was developed in 2004 by Kapferer as a model for establishing and promoting the uniqueness of a particular brand among other competing brand names. Kapferer's identity prism as illustrated in Figure 6.1 (p. 152) comprises six axes grouped into two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension comprises images built by the sender (physical facet and personality) and images built by the receiver (external consumer and self-image). The horizontal dimension comprises interpretations of the brand consisting of externalizations (relationship) and internalizations (cultural values).

In order to lay a framework for the application of the identity prism, Archetti begins by using Al Qaeda as a case study. She describes and analyzes Al Qaeda's narrative strategy through the structures of the identity prism, as shown in Figure 6.2 (p. 156). Archetti explains how the jihadist narrative is constructed and subtly channeled to audiences to create cases of individual jihad and massive support for terrorist groups, which the public perceives to be protecting "defenseless people" (p. 157). Archetti states that authorities in the UK can adapt the communication flows provided for in the identity prism to counter the narratives of Al Qaeda. She presents her suggestions in a model shown in Figure 6.3 (p. 156). According to Archetti, this counternarrative process will begin with sustained efforts to present the UK as a liberal and tolerant democracy that gives equal opportunities to people irrespective of race or religion. Second will be the internalization of the core values of human rights and respect for the rule of law. Archetti is of the opinion that if terrorist counternarratives are strategically and effectively channeled, it will lead to a more informed and empowered public that will be ready to challenge any ideology that rejects human rights and institutions of democracy and promotes intolerance and violence.

Although interesting and innovative, Archetti's identity prism raises some questions. Do all other terrorist groups have the same media tactics as Al Qaeda? How will the identity prism cope with the inconsistencies in the narratives of different groups across different cultures? How will the identity prism be applied to terrorist groups in Africa such as Boko Haram and Al Shabab, two globally notorious groups

not mentioned at all in the book? How will the identity prism be applied in countries whose governments claim to be fighting terrorism yet behave like terrorists, denying citizens basic human rights, suppressing women, and fueling religious and ethnic conflicts? Archetti acknowledges that her proposed model is theoretical and open to acceptance and debate. She also recognizes that her model will not end global terrorism, although it could contribute significantly to efforts to counter the spread of terrorist ideologies.

Archetti's overall approach in the book is simple and contemporary. She acknowledges the paucity of contemporary media theories and models to explain terrorism and makes a deliberate effort to provide a new model. The quality and number of sources referenced within the book testify to her years of broad research and her deep understanding of the relationship between terrorist groups and the media. The book is strongly recommended for graduate students and scholars in the fields of communication, political science, and international relations who have interest in terrorism studies. The book will also serve as an invaluable guide for policy makers and security officials involved in developing new approaches to fighting terrorism.