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Controversies in Online Discussion Forums[*]

1.   Introduction

The establishment of online discussion forums has opened up a new range of interaction between different members of the online community on the Internet. Particularly, online discussion forums have established new forms of communication as masses of people can read responses and have access to the information provided there. At the same time, online discussion forums offer private /interpersonal-like communication as registered members can interact with each other via posting and contact each other via a private message system offered by each respective forum.

Online communities have a defined and articulated purpose, offer flexible and extensive gathering places, establish meaningful membership profiles, and allow for a range of roles, such as newcomers, regulars, administrators, and moderators. The communication in online discussion forums is asynchronous (see Crystal, 2006:135), meaning that individual contributions to such forums are saved and kept as they are posted at any time, and these individual posts can be separated by any period of time (Crystal, 2006:140). Today, online discussion forums are ubiquitous on the Internet, dedicated to the discussion of a wide range of topics, and are a part of an online community of users, the purpose of which involves a wide range of topics, such as exchanging information about rare plants, discussing local government, aiding students via distant education (see Preece, 2000:7), talking about games (Crystal, 2006:137), and discussing different aspects of historical arms and armor. The group constituency is also diverse, such as academic, professional, governmental, commercial, and social groups (Crystal, 2006:137).

Online discussion forums have a range of strategies to encourage repeat visitors to post and to ensure the maintenance of a busy online community, where people can interact and share resources. The interaction takes place when participants post on the forums, revealing their individual behavior or, more specifically, posting behavior. This type of behavior and manner of posting makes up a virtual profile and a virtual character for each person. Hence, an individual's behavior can be attributed to that person in online communities. Online communities share many similar behavioral patterns as their counterparts in social communities in real life.

Participants in online discussion forums who make up online communities make friendships and argue with each other and also become involved in long and tedious conflicts and controversies. To deal with conflicts and controversies, each online discussion forum is managed by one person or a small team of people. Different names are used for people in this function, such as administrator, list owner, editor, host, postmaster, maintainer, moderator, or staff (see Crystal, 2006:138). According to Crystal (2006:138), moderators variously apply their power, such as deciding whether a posted message on a discussion board is relevant or offensive.

My objective in this article is to introduce and analyze controversies in online discussion forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor. The analysis of controversies has been an area of interest for pragmaticists, linguists, and philosophers. Early research has concentrated on the analysis of pamphlets in Early Modern Controversies, such as religious, scientific, and medical controversies; hence, the new medium for carrying out controversies, namely the Internet, has not been the focus of research until now.

The corpus of my study consists of two controversial threads that were posted on two different forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor: a) the Forum of Swords and b) the Forum of Ethnographic Swords (Note that the names have been changed for privacy reasons and are pseudonyms). My corpus consists of two threads on two different online discussion forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor, namely the keris controversy, consisting of 18,376 words on the Forum of the Swords, and the nationalism controversy on the Forum of Ethnographic Swords, consisting of 5,211 words.

The controversial thread posted on the Forum of the Swords is titled *keris* (a *keris* is a ritual dagger from Indonesia) controversy, for the main controversial topic of the thread is the criticism of a print article on the history of the *keris* that had led to an online controversy that lasted for thirty days. The controversy started when Manolo Rodriguez, a member of the Forum of Swords, started a thread criticizing the theories written by Melborn in a published article on the development of the *keris*. Melborn is a moderator of the rival forum, the Forum of Ethnographic Swords, and does not take part in the controversy on the Forum of Swords. However, Melborn is a participant in a related controversial thread, entitled *nationalism* controversy, on the Forum of Ethnographic Swords. Nevertheless, some of his supporters participated in the *keris* controversy to defend his position. During the life of the *keris* controversy, there was a constant rhetorical war in the form of a controversy between the supporters and the critics of the article. The whole controversy lasted 30 days before it was closed by a moderator of the Forum of Swords. A number of controversial threads were opened on both forums during a period of four months as a response to each other. During this period, members of both forums were not only fighting each other on different threads on two different sites, but the number of controversial threads rose during this time from October 2006 to March 2007. To illustrate, the *nationalism* controversy thread is used for comparative

purposes for the research of this study. This controversial thread posted on the Forum of Ethnographic Swords deals with the accusation that a moderator of the Forum of the Swords follows nationalistic interests. This thread has also been a main area of controversial communication. This controversy lasted only two days until it was closed by one of the moderators of the Forum of Ethnographic Swords.

2.   The participants in online discussion forums

Different types of people participate in these discussion groups, namely scholars (historians, archaeologists, art historians, military historians, and other scholars from all other fields), private collectors of historical arms and armor, re-enactors of historical events, film directors, stuntmen, filmmakers, practitioners of historical swordsmanship styles, and enthusiasts. Therefore, there are different interest groups that participate in these forums. Thus, different people with different backgrounds make up a diverse community, contributing to an environment where different attitudes and points of view are presented. This is, of course, an environment with high potential for creating controversies.

3.   The principles and rules of communication in online discussion forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor

It is important to take into consideration that moderators regulate both forums: this means that contributors participate in a moderated environment, and, hence, not all moves are tolerated. This, of course, leads to the establishment of a set of rules that need to be followed and respected by forum members. Some of these rules are explicitly written as the formal rules of the forums that each participant agrees to follow before the registration process for each forum is completed. Additionally, there are other rules and principles that are subject to the subjective and individual assessment of each moderator. Failure to respect the rules and principles may result in a written reprimand, suspension of the posting privileges of the member temporarily, or simply in being banned permanently from the forum in question.

There are a number of tools that moderators can use to control their forums. One of these tools is using a set of rules that serve as principles of communication that the moderators can use as a reference to suspend the posting privileges of members who break these rules or principles. Upon registering, each member receives a warning that emphasizes that by pushing the button that states 'I AGREE', the member needs to agree to and follow all the rules. These rules are explicitly called 'Rules and Online Code of Conduct'. The moderators enforce these rules on the forum. One should note that moderators can be divided into two categories: a) moderators who are responsible for

enforcing the rules of the forum, also called administrative duties of moderators, and b) moderators who are specialists in their respective field of arms and armor and make specific contributions to their subforums. Nevertheless, both types of moderators can enforce the rules and are equipped with administrative functions, such as banning a member due to the aggravated violation of a certain rule. These rules regulate and determine the individual posting behavior of each member on the Forum of Swords. Further, the Rules and Online Code of Conduct explicitly stress that any violation of the rules will result in the suspension of posting privileges or banning of members who have violated the rules. In general, forum rules can be divided into two different groups: a) explicit rules or principles that are stated in the charter of forum rules and b) implicit rules. Implicit rules are not explicitly stated in the charter of rules of both forums. Nevertheless, similar to the members of an e-mail environment studied by Graham (2007:745), these principles are followed and respected by the majority of the members of both forums. These principles are the principles of politeness that are expected from participants in online communication and are similar to the politeness principles in an e-mail environment identified by Graham (2007:745). Such principles or 'netiquette rules' include the following: i) threads should be accurately marked with their titles, which should correspond to the content, ii) one should not waste bandwidth by using image hijacking, and iii) one should not 'blat', meaning that one should not reveal the contents of a private message that one has receive

Table 1: The communication principles and rules of the Forum of Swords.

The communication principles and rules of the Forum of Swords	
Explicit rules / principles	
Rule 1	Posting is a privilege, not a right
Rule 2	Real full name for user IDs
Rule 3	Moderated environment; not all individual moves and posts are accepted
Rule 4	Real e-mail addresses have to be provided
Rule 5	Be warm and friendly
Rule 6	No politics; politics of other sites remain on those sites
Rule 7	Trolling and abuse of forums is not tolerated
Rule 8	Sword identification inquires should be done in the forums and not via private messages
Rule 9	No firearm / gun pictures and posts
Rule 10	User account deletion policy
Implicit rules / principles (netiquette)	
Rule 11	Threads should be accurately marked in their titles
Rule 12	One should not waste bandwidth by using image hijacking
Rule 13	One should not blat

Table 2: The communication principles and rules of the Forum of Ethnographic Swords.

The communication principles and rules of the Forum of Ethnographic Swords	
Explicit rules / principles	
Rule 1	Discussion and interlinking to any (online) auction is forbidden

Rule 2	Spamming or intentional business advertisement is strictly forbidden
Rule 3	Flames, insults, bigotry, and threats are strictly forbidden
Rule 4	Uploading copyrighted pictures without permission and posting pornographic materials are strictly forbidden; no image hijacking
Rule 5	Posting controversial topics, such as religion and politics, and trolling are forbidden
Rule 6	Special forum policies: to sell an item on the Swap Forum, one must own and be able to transfer clear title
Rule 7	Legal discussions: discussions about circumventing laws or regulations regarding ownership of edged weapons and their transportation or exportation are not allowed
Rule 8	Making public appraisals on the forum are forbidden
Rule 9	Decisions made by site / forum administrators and forum moderators are not subject to public debate
Rule 10	Summary: every member is solely responsible for what he writes, every member must obey the law, each member should refrain from advertising on the forum unless he/she posts ads on the Swap Forum, and members should keep the communication civil and respectful
Rule 11	Enjoy the forum
Implicit rules / principles (netiquette)	
Rule 12	Threads should be accurately marked with their titles
Rule 13	One should not waste bandwidth by using image hijacking
Rule 14	One should not blat

4.　　Individual moves and strategies used in online controversies

To participate in controversies and to fight the opponents, one needs a set of individual moves and strategies to attack the opponents. At the same time, one needs to be prepared for the attacks of the opponents, hence a thorough knowledge of defensive moves and strategies is required to defend against an opponent's attacks. Although the requirement has always been not to attack the opponent personally and stick to logical argumentation, getting personal has always been the norm. One needs to take into consideration that all these individual moves and strategies have been subject to rules and principles that have been required of each participant.

Participants in online discussion forums use different person-related moves and strategies to explain their points when they are involved in a controversy. Generally, these moves and strategies are designed to render the opponent speechless and, at the same time, to impress the audience. Generally, individual moves that are used in controversies in online discussion forums can be divided into: a) opening moves, b) attacking moves, c) defending moves, d) counterattacks, e) deflecting moves, f) accusation moves related to violations of principles of communication, g) neutral moves, and i) using rhetorical and direct questions in controversies.

4.1 Opening moves

Online controversies normally start when a member of the forum starts a thread accusing a writer or other member of the other forum (or the same forum) of something. During this tactic, the thread creator either starts the thread and his accusation move by giving a link to a thread being discussed on another forum and criticizing its contents, or he refers to a published article or book, criticizing it. Almost in all controversial threads, similar to religious and medical controversies in the 17th century investigated by Fritz (2005a:152), accusations are often used as opening moves, and then they tend to dominate the whole controversy.

In the *keris* controversy, in opening the thread, Manolo first introduces the article by Melborn by providing a link to the Forum of Ethnographic Swords. Then, he uses the citation-and-reply method (selective quoting system). This is a function of online discussion forums allowing the participants to quote parts of the post of a contributor or even place parts of an article in a quote box and answer it. In online controversies, this method is often used when the opponents engage in one forum, challenging each other's views. Referring to the writing of the opponent was also used in religious German pamphlets, which was used as a method of a counterargument, similar to the traditional method of academic argumentation (see Schwitalla, 1999:117). In the following, Manolo uses the selective quoting principle and cites parts of the article by Melborn, first pointing out the similarities between Melborn's hypothesis and his own 'Armed Fashion Theory':

(1) Manolo:

> *The political unrest of the late classical period, prior to Majapahit, is also a possible factor in the development of the modern keris from the keris buda. In such times a light, fast, thrusting weapon would tend to be more useful than a weapon used with a slower overarm stabbing action. The lighter weight, and greater convenience of carry of the modern keris would have tended to see this longer, lighter, faster version of the Javanese personal dagger, favoured over the heavier, slower keris buda. Particularly so if the social environment was unsettled, and it was considered desirable to always have a means of defence at hand.*

This should sound familiar to readers of my recent "armed fashion theory" threads; he posits – as "armed fashion theory" does -- that access to armed violence redistributes in inverse proportion to social order. He also posits an idea, supported in "armed fashion theory" and elsewhere, that weapon form follows function and that dress imposes constraints on the carry and design of weapons. So far so good, as -- like I always say -- good theories should reinforce each other.

In the next step, Manolo criticizes the theoretical background of the article by placing some questions and accusing Melborn. Thus, he provides strong support for the charges he makes against Melborn's article (for a similar individual move used in the religious controversies by the end of the 16th century, see Glüer, 2001:27):

(2)   Manolo:
        [. . .] Why does he propose speed to be more important for civilian fighters than battlefield fighters?

In the *nationalism* controversy, the thread starter, Eidel, initiates the thread by accusing a moderator of another forum of having nationalistic ideas (for the use of accusations as opening moves, see Fritz, 2005:152).

An interesting feature of this accusation is that Eidel, as the thread initiator, starts the thread with an apology. This apology is not meant as a true apology: it is important consider that this apology cannot be taken at the surface value, similar to the textual element '*This humble booklet*' used in religious controversies in the 17th century (see Fritz, 2005b:235). The forum member Eidel uses these expressions of apology or hedging, such as '*I am not an expert*', just to create an opening for his opinion and provide his own analysis and criticism. Moreover, these moves can be understood as hedging strategies.

(3)   Eidel: Gentlemen,
        I owe you an apology for regularly bringing this issue up in a more controversial way than it should be. I also
        should probably define my position as precise as possible [. . .].

Eidel moves on to the main point of his accusation, namely that being a native does not mean that one can analyze the weapons better.

(4)   Eidel: Indeed, the "natives" who study their weaponry have a number of advantages - they know the language,
        they have access to sources that might not be well known globally and they usually can acquire an access to
        some collections that "outsiders" do not even know about. However in the same time there is no general rule
        that a "native" knows his weapons better than a "foreigner". [. . .] In the end a better researcher with a solid
        educational background will always be a better specialist on swords, independent of his/her nationality, place of
        birth and so on.

4.2   Attacking moves

In both online controversies, the attacking moves comprise a significant number of different tactics. Attacking moves can be considered as conversational violence. Similar to political discourse where politicians use conversational violence as a combined strategy of dominance, defamation, and of enhancing their image (see Luginbühl, 2007:1385), the main contesters involved in controversies in online discussion forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor use a number of strategies to dominate and defame their opponents, and, at the same time, to enhance their own image. Similar to politicians, the aim of the main contesters is to win, but they also want to look like great fighters and fair winners in front of the audience/readers. Similar to political discourse, the development of the topics discussed, the organization of the discussion, and the work on the relationship in controversies in online discussion forums are all subordinate to the goal of winning (for this subordination in political discourse, see Luginbühl, 2007:1385).

A common attacking tactic used by participants in controversies in online discussion forums on arms and armor is to accuse the opponent of not having enough expert or academic knowledge to contribute to debate in an academic environment. In this case, Charley accuses Manolo of not knowing the true meaning of hypothesis. This way, Charley claims that he discovered logical and dialectical defects in Manolo's statements (for the individual move of criticism of logical and dialectical defects, see Fritz and Glüer, 2001a:60–63):

(5)   Charley to Manolo: Mr. Rodriguez, I suggest that you first learn about the nature of a hypothesis, and then study the formal method for its falsification.

Using direct insults is a very rare attacking move in online controversies on arms and armor due to the moderated environment of both forums. Failure to avoid making insults leads to being banned from online forums. The following aggressive post and attacking move was the main post that led to Ehud's temporary ban. Note that he calls his opponents a 'Merry Gang of Attack Poodles'.

(6)   Ehud: In your comment on Amazon.com (addressed to me), you said:"...we've collected enough material to bury you with your own hate" and threatened to report me to Amazon. Please feel free to add my current posting to the file assembled by you and your Merry Gang of Attack Poodles.

4.3   Defending moves

These moves include a range of defensive moves and tactics. One of them is to defend the author of the article or book who is being criticized and is under attack.

Defending the author of the article is a very common defensive move since, after a controversial thread criticizing an article or person is posted, it does not take a long period of time until another person enters the controversy to defend the author. In the next post, Paulo enters the controversy to defend the author of the article, namely Melborn. First, he starts his post by praising the level of expertise of the author of the article and tries to explain the author's line of argumentation of the text by quoting a statement from the author himself. At the end of his post, Paulo stresses that he does not consider the contributors to the controversy, meaning the critics of Melborn's article, as experts:

(7)   Paulo: First of all, I think mr. Melborn is a very knowledgable person on the subject of the keris, who is unlikely to just spout off some theories. I hope he can join us in this debate. I would also like to point out that he did start the "Reasons for Change" paragraph with the following alinea: "The development of the keris buda from Prambanan I, and the modern keris from the keris buda can be supported with evidence, and accepted with reasonable confidence. However, the reasons for this development are pure hypothesis. Nonetheless, I would like to present the following for your consideration". I think he is absolutely right about that, and no one can truly claim to know exactly why the keris changed. [. . .] Evolution generally goes only one way. Especially in a rather traditional environment. Don't underestimate the power of simple fashion. [. . .] But casting doubts on a theory isn't as difficult as presenting another and more likely theory. [. . .] I would prefer this someone to be an expert in another but closely related field.

Another defensive move used in online controversies dedicated to the study of arms and armor is to refer to sources of authority and defend the author of an article. Similar to the move of referring to the Bible used in religious controversies (for this individual move in Early Modern Controversies, see Fritz and Glüer, 2001a:64), Charley claims that the authorities on the subject of the *keris* all praise Melborn's article and tries to isolate Manolo and his statements:

(8)   Charley: The comments of Dr. Daru (curator of the Museum in Amsterdam) made in his publication on Keris,, and of Maren in his article seemed to bear out my impression of the Melborn article. That is, until I read the comments of Mr. Rodriguez. These comments forced me to ask myself what it was that Mr. Rodriguez had read that I, and apparently Daru and Maren, had not.

4.4   Counterattacks

In online controversies, counterattacks are used to attack the opponent. Counterattacks can also be divided into different types. One of the typical counterattack moves is retorting and correcting the statements of the opponent by providing examples. In the *keris* controversy, Manolo uses a counterattack against his opponent by correcting his statements. Manolo counterattacks Charley, who tried to defend the author of the article, stresses that the hypothesis of the writer of the article is, indeed, wrong, and suggests that he has uncovered false conclusions in the article (for the individual move of uncovering false conclusions that was used as part of the dialectics of defense in Early Modern Controversies, see Glüer, 2001:27). In the following, Manolo claims that the hypothesis and the conclusion of Melborn were wrong as i) there is no correlation between grip choice and civilian fighting utility and ii) the author fails to demonstrate a correlation.

(9)   Manolo: Yes, but the point is that there's no correlation between grip choice and civilian fighting utility, which is what Melborn implied. [. . .] But Melborn propose more than evoltion – he proposed correlation. The correlation is what he failed to demonstrate. [. . .] Yes, but the first step in creating a more likely theory is to sweep away the previous, bad theory, which I'm trying to do here.

4.5 Deflecting moves

These moves are neither offensive nor defensive in nature and only serve to deflect and ignore the opponent's attacks and accusations. The goal is to avoid the attacks of the opponent by deflecting them without getting pushed into a defensive position and the need to justify oneself. Claiming incomprehension and misunderstanding of the statements by the opponent is a common deflecting move used in online controversies. By claiming that the opponent does not understand or even misunderstands the views expressed in an article, the participant tries to deflect and, hence, belittle the statements of his opponents. In this case, Charley claims that the contributors (the critics of Melborn's

article) did not really understand and comprehend the main points of the article and provides a link to his article that is online:

(10)   Charley: Some of the contributions to this thread indicate that the contributors may not have read and understood what Melborn wrote in his article "Origins of the Keris". In light of this apparent lack of understanding of the content of the article, I recommend that those who wish to comment upon this article read the article in its entirety, take time to understand what has been written, and then comment. Here is a link to the article:

4.6   Accusation moves related to violations of principles of communication

As stated before, each forum is regulated by a set of rules that need to be followed by each participant. At times, participants accuse their opponents of a violation of agreed principles. These rules can be rules set up by the forum itself as presented before (explicit rules) or rules that are perceived by the participants as important in academic discussion (implicit rules). Sometimes, accusations are so cryptically phrased that only a small number of participants will understand the message and feel addressed. As was stated before, the Forum of Swords has a set of rules that members have to respect and follow. One of these rules is 'being warm and friendly'. It means that the participants of the forum need to keep a friendly and warm atmosphere and avoid any denigrating remarks. In the *keris* controversy, David refers to the statement 'fascinating' as posted by Charley and accuses him of having violated the principle of being warm and friendly of the Forum of Swords:

(11)   David: Please explain why this is fascinating. I am sure you meant this literally as to do otherwise may be a violation of the "be warm and friendly" rule here at the Forum of Swords.

4.7   Neutral moves

These moves are applied by participants in controversial threads who do not want to take any sides. Hence, they state their opinions in a neutral way. One of the features of controversies in online discussion forums is that, at times, participants post on a controversial thread and do not want to take either side. In this case, these participants do not want to contribute to the aggressive mode of the controversy. In his post in the *nationalism* thread, Tony explicitly addresses the moderators and stresses that he is not interested in contributing to the controversy but simply stating his opinion:

(12)   Tony: Moderators: Please take note that I am not trying to rock the boat. The following post is just another view and opinion of one person, or one nation.

4.8 Using rhetorical and direct questions in controversies

Questions in different communication settings play different roles as they have different discourse functions in different situations. For example, questions in advertising discourse are used to challenge and persuade consumers into purchasing certain products, and, therefore, questions in such a communication setting have a rhetorical function (see Leech, 1966:111–112). On the other hand, questions in the courtroom also have a different function as they are not meant for seeking information but for leading up to a final decision (Stenström, 1988:310). As communication in an online discussion forum resembles a dialogue in written form and, hence, all participants can ask questions, the questions asked during controversies in online discussion forums are not like the questions asked in the courtroom discourse and the discourse of news interviews, in which only the examiner and the interviewer are allowed to ask questions (see Stenström, 1988:310 and Jucker, 1986:100). In online discussion forums, each member can ask questions and respond to them. Surely, different questions can be asked during the course of a controversy. Gloning (2005:270) states that as controversies are communicative events, questions of meaning and mutual understanding are crucial as well. Problems such as questions of word usage, problems of the proper interpretation of utterances, problems of mutual knowledge, problems of vagueness, problems of ambiguity, problems of misunderstanding, and problems of individual language use as opposed to established usage, occur in controversies as well (Gloning, 2005:270–271). At times, participants involved in controversies in online discussion forums ask questions when there is a problem of vagueness or ambiguity and problems of misunderstanding. However, questions also have a fully different function in online discussion forums. Participants ask questions the way politicians do, meaning that they use them to attack their opponents. Regarding questions asked by politicians, Lüginbühl (2007:1386) states that politicians stage cooperative behavior by performing inoffensive speech acts, such as giving advice and asking questions. In spite of the fact that these speech acts look inoffensive on the surface, they often have the implication of serious attacks on the integrity of the opponents, enabling politicians to behave in a competitive way. The following example shows how Manolo uses a rhetorical question to attack Melborn's article:

(13)   Manolo: Why does he assume overarm stabbing is suited for military fighting but not for civilian fighting?
Even a cursory fashion survey shows that a large number of civilian daggers, from a great range of times and places, were used in overarm stabbing.

5. Conclusion

Different participants take part in online discussion forums, ranging from scholars to re-enactors and from martial artists to enthusiasts. For the purpose of this article, I

introduced two different forums, namely the Forum of Swords and the Forum of Ethnographic Swords. These two forums are the locations where two controversial threads of the *keris* controversy and *nationalism* controversy took place. Both forums are moderated environments, supervised by different moderators. The moderators and administrators ensure that forum rules are followed and respected. Each forum has a set of rules that are explicitly written in the charter of rules in each forum. Additionally, there are also rules of netiquette that each member is expected to respect and follow.

Different members have different interests when they get involved in an online controversy. They either try to attack a person, an article, a book written by a rival from another forum or simply by someone they do not like or they consider their work as not good, or they try to defend someone who is being criticized. Opening moves are generally accusations. Other moves are attacking moves, which range from supporting the criticism of the thread initiator, agreement with supporters, accusing the opponent of not having sufficient knowledge, and insulting. Surely, there are also a number of defensive moves that are used to defend against attacks. Defensive moves used in both the *keris* and *nationalism* controversies include defending the author of the aricle and refutation with reference to authorities.

A number of moves are counterattacks, which are chosen by members who either, instead of defending, switch to counterattacks or are used after defensive moves. Counterattacks include retorting and correction of the statements of the opponent, using the partial point-by-point method to counterattack, accusations of mispresentation, and apologizing as an answer to the accusation. Next to attacking and defensive moves, they are certain moves that are used to deflect the attack of opponents.

Online discussion forums dedicated to the study of arms and armor are governed by a set of explicit rules. Additionally, there are some implicit rules as well. Any violation of these rules results in accusations of violating certain rules and principles. One of these accusations in the *keris* controversy is the accusation of violating the principle of being warm and friendly. There are also neutral moves that are posted between controversial posts. Rhetorical and direct questions are also used as special individual moves in controversies. Rhetorical questions are used to support a certain position or to attack the position of the opponent.

I would like to stress that further future research on controversies in online discussion forums will shed more light on what extent the new medium, the Internet in general and online discussion forums in particular, has changed the nature of carrying out controversies. Surely, one can already observe that through the introduction of the new medium, some new communication principles have been introduced, and some old communication principles have also been changed and adapted. A further linguistic study of controversies in online discussion forums will show how and why this new medium has taken up such an important role in some circles, such as the arms and armor

community, and, above all, whether this new medium will find acceptance in other circles in the future.

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