

Based on controversies in general and focused on Early Modern Controversies<sup>1</sup> in particular, another purpose of this study is to analyze whether the individual tactics, strategies, and principles for carrying out a controversy have changed over time and whether the new medium, namely the Internet, has influenced and changed the tactics, strategies, and norms accordingly. During the course of this volume, the individual tactics and strategies applied in the Early Modern Controversies will be discussed first. These points will be a baseline for an analysis of which similar types of these individual tactics and strategies in controversies take place on the Internet and whether new individual tactics and strategies have been added to the repertoire of moves<sup>2</sup> and strategies. In my volume, I hope to uncover some new, individual tactics and strategies that have been developed during the course of time and due to the new principles and rules of online communication, which should have an impact on the nature of controversies.

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.<sup>3</sup> The controversial thread posted on the Forum of the Swords is titled *keris*<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> a member of the Forum of Swords, started a thread criticizing the theories written

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1 Fritz (2008:164) calls controversies in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the “Golden Age” of controversies.

2 A move is a specific rhetorical device and line of argumentation used in a controversy.

3 Note that the names have been changed for privacy reasons and are pseudonyms.

4 A *keris* is a ritual dagger from Indonesia. For more information on this type of dagger, see Hamzuri (1988) and Solyom and Solyom (1978). Note that I changed the original title of the thread due to anonymity reasons and coined the title *keris* controversy for the controversial thread on the Forum of Swords.

5 Note that the personal names have been altered for privacy reasons and are pseudonyms.

by Melborn<sup>6</sup> in a published article on the development of the *keris*. Melborn is a moderator<sup>7</sup> of the rival forum, the Forum of Ethnographic Swords, and does not take part in the controversy on the Forum of Swords. However, as I will show later, Melborn is a participant in a related controversial thread, entitled *nationalism* controversy, on the Forum of Ethnographic Swords.<sup>8</sup> 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.

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

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7 As I will explain later, a moderator of a forum is a member with special rights who regulates and monitors the forum based on a prescribed set of rules and principles.

8 I coined the title *nationalism* controversy for the controversial thread on the Forum of Swords due to privacy reasons. The original thread's name is different.

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.

In my research, I will analyze the use of personal style in online controversies and hope to find features peculiar to controversies in the online medium. Regarding the personal style in controversies, Gloning (2005:272) explains that contemporary readers and controversialists of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at times, point to a 'personal style' of operating in a controversy. Gloning suggests that this kind of impression of a personal style can be analytically explained to some extent by a) identifying the types of moves in conjunction with the respective commitments, b) looking for linguistic expressions used in controversies, and c) revealing the communicative principles that the opponents follow. For the purpose of my study, I will analyze the types of moves used in controversies in online discussion forums, the types of principles that participants follow, and linguistic features and expressions used.

In analyzing my corpus that 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, I have combined different elements from different theories in my research methods and added new elements to them. I will analyze online controversies by using the traditional methodologies of analyzing controversies in the Early Modern Period and make a comparison to online controversies. Additionally, I will analyze the controversial texts in online discussion forums by using theories of analyzing the language of the Internet and make a comparative study. Therefore, my research here differs from previous work in the field because of the combination of different research methods as indicated above.