Summary, critical consideration and outlook

This last section summarizes the results of this thesis. First, the key findings regarding the theoretical and methodological research objectives of this study are presented. Second, the praxeological objective is addressed by showing managerial implications. Third, the research methodology and results are critically considered, by pointing out limitations in design and analysis approach but also contributions to the existing body of academic literature. Both the summary and the critical consideration are kept short at this point. More comprehensive summaries and discussions can be found within the individual sections. This thesis closes by providing manifold indications for future research in the field of user generated branding.
1 Summary of the study results

This study coins the term user generated branding (UGB) understood as a brand management approach dealing with the emerging phenomenon of consumer created brand messages in new media. Three research problems have been pursued: first, defining and differentiating user generated branding as a new research field, second, examining factors which drive the attitude toward a UGB programme and third, exploring the effects of a UGB programme sponsored by a brand. While the first two problems establish the basis, the main focus is on the third, i.e. proving the effectiveness of UGB programmes in corporate brand communication. For this purpose, a comprehensive survey among ~3,000 consumers was conducted, analysing three different real life UGB applications from different industries.

In response to the first research problem, this thesis defines UGB within the framework of the identity-based brand management approach as the "...strategic and operative management of brand related user generated content (UGC) to achieve brand goals." Deriving from the notion of content, brand related UGC is defined as "...the representation of the voluntary creation and public distribution of personal brand meaning undertaken by non-marketers outside the branding routines and enabled by multimedia technology." That is, UGB is considered as a management approach dealing with all kinds of user generated brand related artefacts – from original comments, reviews, ratings and artistic work to remixes with corporate content. Those grassroots messages may be distributed as a text, image, audio or video format via Web2.0 and mobile platforms such as blogs, review, media sharing and social networking sites. They may thereby represent both expression of customer complaint and brand fan dedication.

With regard to the elaborated UGB definition, UGB is not to be confused with related terms. Unlike mass customization, it does not refer to a co-design process within a fixed solution space but deals with freely created personal brand meaning. UGB as a whole is also not to equate with online brand communities and word of mouth (WOM): While brand communities represent a network and WOM represents a channel, UGB refers to content. This content, however, may be generated by community members and disseminated by online WOM. UGB creators are thereby regarded as creative consumers but not necessarily as lead users. Since not the users are the sole authors but the brand-owning company still interferes, UGB is also not to be mixed up with open source brands. Finally, UGB is more than eBranding. While the latter aims at using the channel internet to present a brand, UGB refers to a grass-