

ZEROth LAW OF DATA: MUSINGS ON DATA PRIVACY, CONSENT AND OWNERSHIP

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Zero Party Data is the latest concoction of the new-fangled verbiage in Martech. The term may be new, but its underlying principle is sound (and age-old), thereby making it an important topic to understand and embrace.

So what is it? Forrester defines Zero Party Data as “**Data that a customer intentionally and proactively shares with a brand**, which can include preference centre data,

purchase intentions, personal context, and how the individual wants the brand to recognize her/him.” A veritable mouthful, which we will seek to unpack as we move along.

But, before we move along, ZPD as we shall now abbreviate it, bears a passing resemblance to a concept in Physics - the Zeroth Law of Thermodynamics, which bases its foundations on the transitive property, i.e., two systems which are in thermal equilibrium with a third system are in thermal equilibrium with each other. ZPD works on a similar principle that of finding equilibrium between three disparate entities that seek to be in equilibrium with each other, i.e. Vendor/Supplier, the end-user and the Data systems like CDPs that make sense of the digital relationships between the former and the latter.

The simplest and yet most profound element of the idea of ZPD is the *voluntary* sharing of data by end-users with brands. Consent is a part of our social and political discourse in today’s world - *Does it not, therefore, stand to reason that it is actively an important component of our collective digital identity as well?*

Customers respect and build relationships with brands whom they can trust over a long period of time without unnecessarily being taken advantage of. Like any other relationship that stands the test of time, honesty and trust remain the cornerstones of digital data sharing as well. And this brings us neatly to the idea of Ownership.

The last fifteen years have led wits to compose the painfully real question of ‘Whose Data is it anyway?’. Data collected anonymously, via third party cookies and through innovative first-party and second-party collection has thrust the issue of data ownership to the forefront. With greater digital literacy, pulling wool to collect an end-user’s data and aggressively targeting him/her/them is rapidly being equated to digital militancy. The solution?

Recognize that Ownership is not nebulous and customer data belongs to the customer. To obtain it, one must solicit it with respect. Much like in real life.

Lastly, and just as importantly, is the question of Data Privacy. It is the foundation of all that has been discussed. The zeroth principle of the zeroth law of data, if you will. Data Privacy (or the Right to be forgotten) is the embodiment of modern liberal and democratic ideals translated into its digital avatar. It is the right guaranteed by our collective global conscience of maintaining privacy over what we deem to be the most important facet of digital existence - our very identities. ZPD is a realistic acknowledgement of the fact that to truly make inroads and to truly serve customer needs, a collaborative framework is the cleanest solution. Therefore, ZPD needs to be looked at from this lens before a pragmatic approach to move towards digital maturity is arrived at.

What does this all amount to? As with any other aspect of technology, digital marketing and its many offshoots is also subject to what Gartner calls “The Hype Cycle”. After having changed the way we interact with the world around us, the way we buy, sell and indeed live, Digital Marketing has finally reached the stage where it must confront the issues of identity sharing and privacy head-on and enable alternate revenue levers to open up. Collaboratively enabling customers to share data they are comfortable sharing to empower them to better their digital experiences and to put the end user back in the driver’s seat is what subscribing to the ZPD philosophy amounts to. It is therefore a poignant and potent summation of what our chosen digital future can amount to and in that ability to choose, lies our collective digital emancipation.