

# THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARIAN AS MEDIATOR OF INFORMATION IN THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION LITERACY

## O PAPEL DO BIBLIOTECÁRIO COMO MEDIADOR DA INFORMAÇÃO NA BUSCA PELO LETRAMENTO INFORMACIONAL

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**Submitted:** 22/01/2019

**Accepted:** 25/11/2019

**Published:** 19/12/2019



**JITA:** CE. Literacy.

**e-Location:** 020001

**ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the role of the librarian as mediator of information in the search for information literacy, focusing on a better service to the needs of the user, taking into account their socio-cultural context against the new informational demands and dynamics. From a systematic review on the subject, the theoretical-analytical dimension of the subject is undertaken, instituting a trajectory on diverse interdisciplinary theories for the understanding of the possible mediations that involve the successive approximations of this object of study. The analysis of the theoretical framework is based on a deductive approach, starting from the description of the particularity of the role of the librarian in the perspective of the information society. From the mediation of information in libraries to the definition of the renewed role of the librarian in face of this social phenomenon of information; he, as mediator of information, confronts several challenges, with emphasis on pedagogical

**KEYWORDS**

Information of Mediation. Information Literacy. Librarian. Information user.

**RESUMO**

O presente artigo discute o papel do bibliotecário como mediador da informação na busca pelo letramento informacional, focando-se em um melhor atendimento às necessidades do usuário, levando em consideração seu contexto sociocultural frente às novas demandas e dinâmicas informacionais. De uma revisão sistemática acerca da temática, empreende-se a dimensão teórico-analítica da mesma instituindo-se um traçado sobre diversas teorias interdisciplinares para a compreensão das possíveis mediações que envolvem as aproximações sucessivas desse objeto de estudo. A análise do marco teórico se baseia em uma abordagem dedutiva, partindo da descrição da particularidade do protagonismo do bibliotecário na perspectiva da sociedade da informação. Da mediação da informação nas bibliotecas à definição do papel renovado do bibliotecário diante desse fenômeno social da informação; ele, como agente mediador da informação, confronta diversos desafios, tendo destaque, o de natureza pedagógica.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Mediação da Informação. Letramento Informacional. Bibliotecário. Usuário da Informação.

## 1 Introduction

Starting from the perspective of Capurro (2003), the Information Science is developed by the evolution of three interrelated epistemological paradigms: the physical, the cognitive and the social. These paradigms place the studies of information users in different approaches as described below: the physical paradigm between the 1960s and 1970s with its traditional and positivist approach, emphasized the technological aspect, directed to the retrieval and transfer of information, without the user as the main actor of the system itself; the cognitive paradigm that manifested as from 1970, with an alternative approach, sought to understand how the user assimilated and transformed information into knowledge. In this period, the user of the information becomes the object of investigations, having the cognitivist processes associated to the search, organization and use of the information; in the mid-1990s, the emergence of the social paradigm with a socio-cultural approach began to contemplate the studies of information users in their inter-subjective social relations, focusing on their informational behavior. It is noticed that such notes are no longer satisfactory to solve problems pertinent to the efficient use of information, in response to their real and concrete needs for the effective production of knowledge.

In this context, the fields of Librarianship and mainly Information Science moved, from the 1970s, by the new social paradigm sought to understand the user from their needs in the search and retrieval of information on a wide range of media and sources of information. From this perspective, information begins to gain significant values for diverse contexts, scopes and levels and users of this new configuration cease to be just passive subjects and become actively involved in the process of information construction and, therefore, knowledge.

This conception emphasizes information as a social phenomenon whose fundament lies in the understanding that subjects are increasingly able to construct significantly structured knowledge, based on their socially shared interactions and actions, associated with collective information practices, such as mechanisms to develop their skills in dealing with information.

From this angle, it is important to emphasize that in this modernist effect inherent in the new model of society, called by Castells (2016) of information society, information becomes ubiquitous, accessible not only through traditional media, well known to information professionals, but also by social networks, blogs, user communities on the Internet, etc. It is disseminated through innumerable characteristics and dimensions, sometimes combining texts, sounds and images. This apparent ease of access and profusion hides an increasing need for tools and methods for the best appropriation of relevant information to informational subjects.

From this perspective, user studies are important tools of planning and management, since they provide information professionals with the ability to identify their users' profiles, with the objective of planning services and products to serve an increasingly complex community in relation to information. These information products and services include those relating primarily to education and user training, and literacy or information literacy, which seek to instruct users to assist those who need to become familiar with the information being physical or digital. (CUNHA, 2015).

In this regard, the efficient and judicious use of information is undertaken, first of all, within professional socio-cultural requirements and actions, in knowing how to identify and

characterize informational needs. This evokes the ability to determine relevant sources, question them, retrieve information and know-how to evaluate them. For this context, it is assumed that the development of informational literacy of users, requires the librarian as mediating agent of information, the protagonism of a preponderant role in what concerns the tasks of librarianship. However, the adoption of this concept confronts the library with a multilevel challenge.

The figure of the protagonist librarian has been gaining ground in the literature as this professional has been increasingly involved in actions that promote greater and more direct interaction with library users, especially with regard to a more conscientious, critical formation and a social responsibility. Developing skills and abilities where positioning is required can help the librarian to perform his activities in order to anticipate problems; respond promptly to questions in a willing manner, willing to learn continuously; use available resources to succeed in the activities undertaken, formulating strategies, and being able to overcome daily obstacles during the execution of their activities (FARIAS, 2015).

The strengthening of the activities of making librarians, regarding their critical positioning, has been highlighted in studies that address the attitude of this professional, who has long ceased to be just technical and passive, and has been modified mainly to meet an audience with increasingly diverse information demands and needs.

From this consideration, this article is based on a theoretical-analytical dimension of the library in the process of developing informational literacy of users through the mediation of information and thus expose the attribute of action articulated to their functions, their professionals and challenges in the context of the article, and thus, to launch a sociological, pedagogical and strategic look at their properties. From a systematic review on the subject, the analysis of the theoretical framework is based on a deductive approach, from the description of the particularity of the role of librarianship in the perspective of the information society, with a view to discuss the role of the librarian as mediator of information in the search for informational literacy.

## 2 The Mediation of Information in Libraries

Starting from a comprehensive view of the notion of mediation and the creation of meaning, one can consider that our physical relation to the concrete world is minimal, and against of this relationship of detachment, how can we know it? In this context, the author Almeida Júnior (2015) argues that we know him through the eyes of the other; we know it mediated by the eyes of others. We are dependent on others to build our knowledge. The world that is shown to us is not a reflection, but a refraction (as well as information). From a phenomenological approach, one can say that our knowledge is constructed mediated and, in the same way, we are mediators in the construction of the knowledge of others.

For the approach that one wishes to give to this article whose fundament is based on a functionalist and utilitarian view of the informational variable that guides the conception of the

notion of 'mediation', it can be said that it is understood as an accompaniment, personalized or not in the form of a possible answer to the contemporary diversification of users, their demands and their practices, in a society that is embarked on an era of information profiled to perfect the processes of informational consumption. However, this notion of mediation is emphasized here about functions whose purpose is to encourage the development of user autonomy for the acquisition of a series of transversal skills necessary to classify and evaluate information and its sources.

The mediation of information in libraries (be they school, university, public or specialized) has as main event the dialogical encounter between librarians and users. Mediation requires a careful look at the constitution of collections, organization of spaces, frequency in the accomplishment of cultural activities and pedagogical practices developed in these units. Understanding the 21st century library as a space of knowledge appropriation and a cultural device is a task to be carried out by the professional librarians who are part of this informational environment (RASTELI; CAVALCANTE, 2014; RIBEIRO; FERREIRA, 2016).

This notion of 'library of the 21st century' (GONÇALVES FERREIRA; LEMOS RIBEIRO, 2016) focuses on the role of the library in the conservation, dissemination, transmission and creation of knowledge at the beginning of the 21st century. Given the multiplicity of social needs and the wealth of technical support available to libraries, many questions arise about how to strengthen their presence in today's society.

This paradigm is due to two major trends confronting the world of libraries two decades ago: first, the development of information and internet technologies that radically changed the practices and principles of access to documents; Second, librarians enriched the range of their interventions, gradually becoming content producers and mediators of information in the process of information literacy, and collecting, preserving, and distributing books and documents. The 21st century library becomes a space for mediation of information in the most diverse physical and digital media.

In contemporary times, the notion of mediation in the field of Librarianship and Information Science has been studied mainly in the scope of informational equipment, understood here as environments and information units. As an object of study of these areas, mediation admits several approaches, among which the mediation of information, reading and research deserve special mention (CARVALHO, 2018).

In this area, libraries are considered as meaning-producing devices, allowing access to information, observing the construction of meanings experienced through research, reading, literature in general, cultural events and contact with the arts ( RASTELI; CAVALCANTI, 2014). These responsibilities and institutional functions, parameterized in the vectors and hierarchical, differential and generic variables of the culture (BAUMAN, 2012), remit a crucial importance of informational literacy in the achievement of these necessary skills of the user.

### 3 Contextualization Of Information Literacy

From the 1970s, the understanding of the needs, search and use of information sources, especially those of an electronic nature, by users, created a concept, coined in the United States, entitled information literacy, a movement initiated by the North Librarians Americans working within this socio-cultural perspective (TANUS, 2014). This concept intensified in Brazil from the 2000s and took on different aspects in the studies, such as “competência informacional”, “letramento informacional”, “alfabetização informacional”, “habilidade informacional”, “fluência informacional” (CAMPELLO, 2003).

Since then, the term informational literacy is related to the conception of learning as a strategy to develop informational skills. In search of a more comprehensive dimension that undertakes the subjectivity of the information user and the social value of information, informational literacy becomes a prerequisite for the success of learning centered on the informational subject and his autonomy, allowing him to acquire habits of reading and constant updating, from the appropriate use of informational search tools and strategies, contributes to the development of critical and responsible thinking in relation to the performance in society, being essential to lifelong learning. For, it consists of

a continuous process of internalization of fundamentals conceptual, attitudinal and skills fundamentals necessary for the understanding and permanent interaction with the informational universe and its dynamics, in order to provide lifelong learning. [...] can be considered as the domain over the informational universe, incorporating skills, knowledge and values related to the search, access, evaluation, organization and diffusion of information and knowledge ((DUDZIAK, 2003, p. 28; 2002, p. 1, our translation)

In societies where information gains a strategic value for performance and hyper-industrialization of cultures, informational literacy takes on a deterministic attribute, if considered as a "beacon of the information society." It consolidates a relative weight in the relations between politics, culture and the economy for social transformation, idealizing the paths to development, prosperity and freedom. In this sense, the information literacy:

- Covers skills to recognize informational needs and to locate, evaluate, apply and create information within cultural and social contexts;
- It is crucial to the competitive advantage of individuals, companies (especially small and medium-sized ones), regions and nations;
- Provides the key to effective access, use and creation of content to support economic development, education, health and services, and all other aspects of contemporary societies, and thus provide the vital fundamentals for achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on the Information Society;
- Go beyond current technologies to encompass learning, critical thinking and interpretive skills across professional boundaries, as well as empowering individuals and communities(COLÓQUIO..., 2005, our translation).

In addition to the obvious overlap of the term with adjacent skills related to information and communication technologies (ICT) and media, the information literacy aims to be more comprehensive, exceeding current technologies and encompassing critical thinking, information interpretation, and such as the production of new knowledge. With these transversal ambitions, the implementation idealized in its process of attaining user skills

depends relatively on the application context. The level may vary according to institutional, professional and social requirements. In this context, it is of crucial importance to understand the role of educational institutions, especially libraries and their agents.

#### 4 The Role of the Librarian in Information Literacy

The educational function of the librarian in the sphere of the construction of the knowledge of informational subjects is a common theme in the discussions that involve the information literacy. What happens in many cases is the ignorance of these functions by the public and / or private institutions where the librarian works; in some cases by the professional himself who does not see himself in the role of protagonist, especially with regard to activities that involve a more critical positioning; beyond the obstacles of innumerable natures, within a co-responsibility movement.

In this context, Farias (2016) argues that the attitude and the ability of the professional librarian should be guided according to the informational needs of the user, especially with regard to [...] attendance in the information services, enabling learning and appropriation of information by users; for this, some skills are relevant such as: knowing how to listen to users; try to be tolerant and flexible against the questions and the different postures of the other; use accessible and respectful language; try to construct questions that allow us to arrive at the expected definition of the questioned theme.

In this regard, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) drafts the National Curricular Guidelines (DCN) of the Librarianship course that includes the following skills and abilities for the formation of the professional librarian, (BRAZIL, 2001):

**a) General:**

- to generate products from the knowledge acquired and disseminate them;
- to develop, coordinate, execute and evaluate plans, programs and projects;
- to use rationally available resources; - develop and use new technologies;
- to translate the needs of individuals, groups and communities in their respective areas of activity; - develop autonomous professional activities, in order to guide, direct, advise, consulting, perform expertise and issue technical reports and opinions; - to respond to the social demands of information produced by the technological transformations that characterize the contemporary world.

**b) Specific:**

- to interact and add value in the processes of generation, transfer and use of information, in any and every environment;
- to criticize, investigate, propose, plan, execute and evaluate information resources and products;
- to work with sources of information of any kind;
- to process the information registered in different types of support, through the application of theoretical and practical knowledge of the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of information;
- to conduct research on products, processing, transfer and use of information.

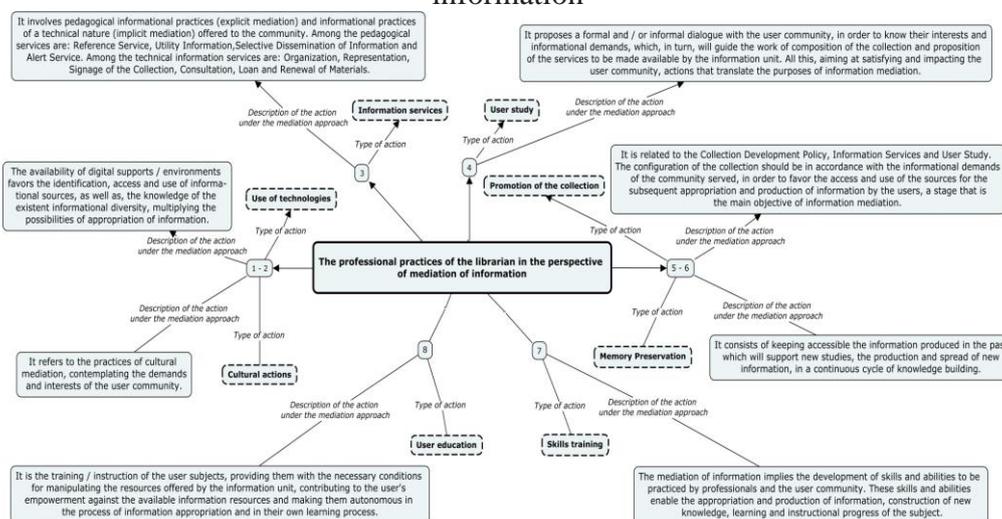
Moreover these skills and abilities, the DCN alludes to the need for the curriculum to contemplate contents of Information Technology and Research Methodology. The document also indicates the importance of the humanistic aspect, highlighting the role of the internship in vocational training.

Therefore, the librarian, by his initial formation, possesses aptitudes to mediate the information that is generated within the most diverse segments. However, when we talk about competence to transform the available information into a value-added asset for the user, we have to go a little bit beyond the academic formation and the exercise of the function.

In 2016, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) produced a report entitled "Competencies for Information Professionals", which deals with the skills and abilities that librarians must possess to work at the present time, where social and technological transformations happen very quickly. According to this report, information professionals are connected by their focus on the management and application of the data, information and knowledge required in their configuration. They have a holistic view of the role of information and knowledge in organizations and communities, and are concerned with information and knowledge across all stages of their life cycle. Information professionals are also connected by the skills they use to perform their duties.

The professional performance of the librarian with emphasis on the mediation of information has become substantial, especially with regard to the development of information literacy of the users, as it is as important to have and make available diverse collections is to enable the use and appropriation of this informational material. In view of the foregoing and based on the skills that a librarian must possess in relation to his/her performance in the perspective of mediation of information, the "Figure 1" illustrates the librarian's performance practices from the perspective of information mediation in various sectors.

**Figure 1.** The professional practices of the librarian in the perspective of mediation of information



Source: CARVALHO, 2018 (Design by the authors, 2019)

According to “Figure 1”, it can be observed that mediation is present in all tasks of the librarian. It is important to emphasize that information mediation cannot only be understood as the act of helping users to find the information they are looking for, but as a deeper work in the search for the development of learning autonomy of this user. Thus, mediation is understood as a necessary activity to help users transform information into knowledge, an indispensable process for the development of information literacy.

The definition of information mediation, presented here, is a step in the process of search and apprehension of knowledge by the user, and should not be seen only as a bridge that connects the user with the desired information. The mediator / librarian should not be static and so passive. The change in the behavior of the librarian, moving from a purely technical stance to a critical stance, respecting the social space of his audience, requires an innovation in the profile of the information professional, a protagonist innovation of his role in the institutions where this professional operates.

## 5 The Challenges of the Librarian and the Library in the Search for Informational Literacy

In the information society, the transversality of information and the use of ICT lead to the contextualization of the notion of informational literacy to a conceptual development that goes beyond the old library approaches. In this sense, librarians are given a mediation role in a transversal dimension. Informational literacy is therefore an answer attributed to the questioning of the importance of the role of libraries and their professionals against the emergence of the Internet and the almost omnipresent availability of information.

From this angle, it is not enough to have access to information (which is possible, at some point, without the absence of a library); since the application of the skills needed to process and exploit the mass of information adds a new responsibility to libraries. In addition to providing, organizing and processing information, the librarian profile requires the performance of an active role in the information society (ELDREDGE, 2004).

Moreover this idealistic approach outlined by the IFLA Manifesto published in 2005 in the Library of Alexandria entitled *lighthouses of the Information Society*, the notion of informational literacy also covers the practical response to the user's challenges to new research tools and digital resources. This is also the reason why information literacy was developed especially in school and university libraries. And, as a professional with the attribution of supporting access to information, the librarian profile requires pedagogical skills (ELDREDGE, 2004). That is why, today, libraries are given this challenge of undertaking as a teaching space.

This new role of the librarian also means new challenges. In the context of information literacy, the challenges can be seen mainly in three levels: conceptual, pedagogical, strategic and organizational.

### *5.1 Conceptual challenge*

The notion of information literacy goes far beyond the traditional training of users, which has often been more informative than the search for empowerment of the same. It is not only a matter of informing about the services offered by the library and of teaching the use of research tools, it is about developing the users' personal skills that go beyond the technical application (GASQUE, 2012). The tools of the library, therefore, serve only as a practical example for the promotion of "know-how" that can be activated as well in other circumstances. A user who learns to define the need for information and deduce the keywords for the search in the library catalog can apply this method to other search tools. At the heart of the search for information literacy are the user and their skills, not the library and its resources (GASQUE, 2012). This is an important change of perspective for librarians.

The emphasis of informational literacy on personal skills also requires consideration of individual contexts, which in turn highlights the need to identify the goals pursued by the user. For, to understand the socio-cultural context in which the user is inserted can result in a very difficult task, taking into account the fragmented characteristic of the process of the formation of the identity of the modern subject in multicultural societies (HALL, 2006, MANUCELLO, 2012). In this context, the possibility of offering training on topics needed to promote their skills requires a very deep sociological and anthropological study of the user (ELDREDGE, 2004).

In the case of libraries operating in an educational environment, training in information literacy can only be effective if it occurs at the appropriate time, for example, as part of a school project (AQUINO GOMES et al., 2016). The search for better integration in the training plan would, of course, be the best solution (GASQUE, 2012). Whatever strategy is adopted, these training initiatives can be coordinated with other educational institutions.

This also occurs because the search for informational literacy goes beyond the professional skills of librarians. For, when it comes to the use of information to create or communicate knowledge, initiatives are often interdisciplinary in nature. In this regard, collaboration is a key factor for the effective implementation of the training process in information literacy.

These collaborative initiatives are not always easy. Beyond institutional barriers, contacts need to be maintained and cared for; are often found in non-conventional solutions and alternatives. It was in this sense that American librarians developed the concept of "Embedded librarians", a concept translated in Ibero-American countries as "bibliotecário incorporado", which describes a profile of a librarian who works in team with other specialists.

(DANE, GEROGES, 2010, NAGARKAR, MURARI, 2010, CARIDAD-SEBASTIÁN, MARTÍNEZ-CARDAMA, 2013).

### *5.2 Pedagogical challenge*

As well, it can be said that the question of epistemological frontier dispute makes it difficult to establish and maintain the collaboration of pedagogical instances, since a natural distrust of pedagogues persists in relation to the activity of non-pedagogues in their field (GABRIEL, 2010). There is, therefore, a work of conviction to be made regarding professional skills. For this purpose, the interdisciplinary action of Information Science, which is interested in possible interventions on the notion of information, is preponderant. Its postmodern approach should be aimed at making this interdisciplinary approach effective by promoting the need for comprehensiveness (or complementarity) of the formation of librarians in the educational sector. This complement facilitates collaboration with pedagogues and helps in understanding the pedagogical dimension of the User Study (DELFINI CORRÊA; RODRIGUES DE SOUZA, 2004).

The notion of informational literacy is also a pedagogical concept that is revealed, for example, in the various standards, references and performance indicators established especially at the university level (GABRIEL, 2010). The purpose of these recommendations and guidelines, which can also be adapted to other educational levels and areas, is to define the skills that constitute the search for informational literacy and to differentiate the expected results of the user in the use of information (CAMPELLO, 2003). These guidelines, thus, form the basis for the training and assessment of user skills. For the implementation of this pedagogy by the skills, it is essential a certain pedagogical knowledge on the part of the librarians.

However, one can say that it is necessary to develop a 'library pedagogy' for this purpose (ELDREDGE, 2004). Often, it is better to provide the necessary skills in the educational field of the respective target audience: school pedagogy, university didactics or adult education. Such continuing formations, out of the library environment, do not complement the skills of the librarian-trainers, but provide the librarian with a broader view of his services and target audience and cover his role and his professional protagonism in the information society (RUSSO, JESUS DE SOUZA, 2013).

### *5.3. Strategic and organizational challenge*

The implementation of a training offer for the search for information literacy requires a strategic approach that frees up essential resources: training of personnel, adaptation of specifications, possible hiring of additional personnel, extra working hours necessary for the development of pedagogical concepts, classroom and teaching materials, as well as planning the training space. Such resources are defended only if the search for information literacy is anchored in the library's strategic objectives approved by the bodies to which they are linked.

Else, it must be considered that the transformation of libraries, in a complementary teaching environment, is a long-term process that must be planned and monitored. And, once the main objectives are achieved, the maintenance, adaptation and development of the existing training offer represents new challenges to be overcome (KESSELMANN; WATSTEIN, 2009).

## 6 Final Considerations

Information as a social phenomenon has been discussed more vehemently since the 1990s with the new social paradigm, emphasizing that subjects are increasingly able to build significantly structured knowledge, from their interactions and actions and the development of skills for dealing with information becomes essential.

According to the literature presented, the aggregation of value attributed to information as a resource in organizations, institutions and society has led to an exponential explosion of it. In addition to the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies, the accessibility and multiplicity of information sources in information systems, as well as the massive integration of multimedia systems, has led to a growing need for users to acquire informational skills.

The almost omnipresence of information in this context has required institutions, in this case, the Library and the librarian, the development of methods and tools that enable the mediation of this information in order to meet users' needs in the context of informational transformations and dynamics.

Besides the mediation of information in libraries, the development of informational literacy of users also becomes a challenge for librarians, since the educational function of this professional in the sphere of knowledge places the importance of the role of libraries no longer as a passive structure in the process but rather as an important tool for the knowledge construction.

This new role of the librarian also means new challenges and in the context of Information Literacy. The challenges can be seen mainly in three levels: conceptual, pedagogical, strategic and organizational.

The role of librarian mediator requires, in addition to the required professional skills and abilities, specific cultural and communication skills, whose development depends on overcoming, among others, difficulties generated by the academic-institutional dispersion of the courses and the discussion of the social roles of this librarian. professionals in the performance of their functions and attributions considering the socio-cultural dynamics in the global and local plans.

The development of learning focuses on the user and their autonomy, allowing them to acquire reading habits and constant updating, from the appropriate use of informational search tools and strategies, and thus contributing to the development of critical and responsible thinking in relation to their performance in society.

From this perspective, a broad understanding of the role of the librarian as a mediator of information in the quest for information literacy, its challenges and unfolding involves a strong relational aspect, between a request (the user's request) and an offer (by the librarian with the challenges) and, therefore, a differentiated service relationship; some in the context of the new informational dynamics in the scope of the lineation of information mediation require a reincorporation of the thematic in the agenda of the strategic studies of the contemporary information user.

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