

User Studies, Mediation of Information and Information Literacy in the Contexts of Social Vulnerability: Possible Dialogues*

Abstract

This article seeks to trace the convergences between the sub-areas/disciplines of user studies, mediation of information and information literacy aimed at the contexts of social vulnerability, seeking to present more holistic views that contribute to the discussions of the area and for the development of social, digital and cultural protagonism of unfortunate groups. In this sense, the methodological procedures were established through the ends as a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive research, seeking to discuss the theoretical-conceptual assumptions and the possible dialogues among the themes brought. Also, the study is classified as bibliographic, since it used reading, analysis and interpretation of concepts and theories about the themes brought up, seeking to present such assumptions and dialogues around the bias of the social perspective of Information Science. As a result of the discussion, it is understood that user studies, mediation of information and information literacy can be considered interference actions, as they are concerned with the understanding and training of critical and reflective citizens in the face of socio-informational realities. The set of these actions consolidates an investigative posture of both the one who teaches as well the apprentice, as it allows empowerment and emancipation in the tangle of available information.

Keywords: User studies, mediation of information, information literacy, social vulnerability, appropriation of information, social empowerment.

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Estudios de usuarios, mediación de la información y alfabetización informacional en contextos de vulnerabilidad social: posibles diálogos

Resumen

Este artículo busca rastrear las convergencias entre las subáreas/disciplinas de estudios de usuarios, mediación de la información y alfabetización informacional dirigidas a los contextos de vulnerabilidad social, con lo cual se busca presentar visiones más holísticas que contribuyan a las discusiones del área y para el desarrollo del protagonismo social, digital y cultural de grupos menos afortunados. En este sentido, los procedimientos metodológicos se establecieron a través de los fines como una investigación cualitativa, exploratoria y descriptiva, para discutir los supuestos teórico-conceptuales y los posibles diálogos entre los temas planteados. Asimismo, el estudio se clasifica como bibliográfico, ya que utilizó la lectura, análisis e interpretación de conceptos y teorías sobre los temas planteados, con el fin de presentar tales supuestos y diálogos en torno al sesgo de la perspectiva social de las ciencias de la información. Como resultado de la discusión, se entiende que los estudios de usuarios, la mediación de la información y la alfabetización informacional pueden considerarse acciones de interferencia, ya que se preocupan por la comprensión y formación de ciudadanos críticos y reflexivos ante las realidades socioinformativas. El conjunto de estas acciones consolida una postura investigadora tanto del que enseña como del aprendiz, ya que permite el empoderamiento y la emancipación en la maraña de información disponible.

Palabras clave: estudios de usuarios, mediación de la información, alfabetización informacional, vulnerabilidad social, apropiación de la información, empoderamiento social.

1. Introduction

In the field of information studies, there is a historical tendency to reflect on the renewal of the processes of production, circulation and appropriation of information and knowledge, based on their material supports, where the techniques of storage, organization and recovery occupy a central highlight, constituting an epistemological and legitimate nucleus about infor-

mation and knowledge (Marteleto, 2017). However, as a domain of the field of social sciences, informational studies need a greater expansion of the approach angles regarding the modes of knowledge and information production, and, above all, of effective discussions and practices for people in situations of social vulnerability – meeting the widespread and discussed notion of nature and social perspective of Information Science.

Contemporaneity presents a broader challenge for Information Science: if in principle, the concern was focused on the development of tools and means for the retrieval of information in the available knowledge supports, currently there is a need to educate people, because they have the right to enjoy the knowledge constituted by humanity. The concept and applicability of information literacy gradually becomes interdisciplinary, with a combination of theories, from the field of education to other fields of science (Righetto, Vitorino & Muriel-Torrado, 2018).

In this perspective, this article seeks to trace the convergences between the sub-areas/disciplines of user studies, mediation of information and information literacy aimed at the contexts of social vulnerability, that is, it seeks to present more holistic views that contribute to the discussions of the area and for the development of social, digital and cultural protagonism of the “unfortunate” groups in information – through bibliographic research of a qualitative nature. This is said since we must not forget that many of today’s problems are extremely complex and cannot be solved by a specialized discipline. This implies that there is a need for transdisciplinarity, in other words, the multiple perspectives and collaborations of the disciplines to arrive at a robust and efficient theoretical-conceptual corpus (Koltay, Špiranec & Karvalics, 2016).

Studies of information users may include research that seeks to understand who the users of information are, their real needs, how their searches are processed and the uses made of that information. Thus, there is the possibility of the strategic development of learning for a better performance of users in their demands and also of the information mediator himself, who can use a better understanding in the interrelation of these three sub-areas, aiming to satisfy users and the improve your own tasks as an information professional.

According to Kuhlthau (1996) and Almeida Junior (2015), the mediation of information is present at all times. Mediation is a concept used by different areas of knowledge to represent different phenomena, however, in the scope of Information Science, it necessarily presupposes the use of a common language between the user and the professional so that interaction between them is possible. The practice of mediation requires the interference of the mediating professional in the process of acquiring information in order to appropriate it to enable the construction of knowledge. In this context, dialogue is considered an indispensable element for mediation to occur and to facilitate the construction of knowledge (Almeida & Farias, 2019).

Information literacy, in its turn, is undoubtedly tied to “learning to learn” and critical thinking, charged with developing attitudes and knowledge that are indispensable to discern when information is needed to help solve a problem or make a decision (Belluzzo, Feres & Valentim, 2015). Furthermore, information literacy represents a process that can (and should, if possible) be developed in all people: children, adults, people with special needs, socially vulnerable/marginalized groups, professionals, etc. This process manifests itself in a singular way, according to the characteristics of each one (Vitorino, 2018).

As for the issue of social vulnerability, it is not new, since this terminology has usually been applied in different disciplines of social sciences for some time. Social vulnerability is characterized by a complex conceptual field, constituted by varied conceptions and dimensions that can turn to the economic, environmental, health, rights, etc. Although the theme has been worked on for years, it is emphasized that its concept is in constant construction, given its magnitude and complexity. The emergence of the theme occurred in the 1990s, with the fatigue of the analytical matrix of poverty and mainly contextualized in economic issues (Monteiro, 2011).

Beforehand, it is emphasized that the premises brought are directly related to the unique role of the information professional as a primary agent in the development of the study tasks of users, information mediator and promoter of lifelong learning (basic assumption of information literacy) to minority/socially vulnerable

groups, since “it takes different shapes in relation to user education and ‘takes it a step further’, and prioritizes the lifelong learning” (Belluzzo, Santos & Almeida Junior, 2014, p. 65).

The methodological choices of the research will be presented next, as well as a brief theoretical-conceptual rescue on the context addressed to reach the general objective, that is, the possible dialogues – read effective applicability – between the subareas mentioned in the contexts of social vulnerability.

2. Methodological Procedures

The methodological procedures were established through the ends as a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive research, as it seeks to discuss the theoretical-conceptual assumptions and the possible dialogues between user studies, mediation of information and information literacy in the context of social vulnerability. As for the means, the study is classified as bibliographic, as it used reading, analysis and interpretation of concepts and theories about the themes brought up, seeking to present such assumptions and dialogues around the bias of the social perspective of Science of Information.

It is also a “baseline research”, because “[...] offers elementary data that support the realization of more in-depth studies on the theme” (Gonsalves, 2001, p. 65). The data for discussion and analysis were extracted from books and scientific articles with international coverage on the topics exposed.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 User Studies

Despite the great flow of information for which contemporary society is taken, it is observed that the subjective issues of the individual have been establishing themselves as a current concern of Information Science. As Le Coadic (1996) states, “[...] without a receiver, however, there is no information. It is the center of information flows” (p. 43). Records and their forms of organization are obviously still part of the tasks of an information unit, but the user is the main actor in this scenario.

Thus, understanding about the importance of systematic activities from the studies of information users is vital, as according to [Cunha, Amaral and Dantas \(2015\)](#) it is more common that these users do not actually express their needs, leaving their demands in the background and based on what they think the system can offer them. Thus, it becomes complex to assimilate the real needs from users. Furthermore, it is not customary to consider non-users or potential users, whose tendency is to assume as an absolute truth that the needs expressed by users correspond to their excellent needs, not considering the needs of potential demands – directing the services almost exclusively and exclusively to the most assiduous populations ([Cunha et al., 2015](#)).

The studies of information users are seen as “an investigation that aims to identify and characterize the interests, needs and habits of using information from real and/or potential users of an information system” ([Dias & Pires, 2004, p. 11](#)) or also a “set of studies that tries to analyze, qualitatively and quantitatively, the users' information habits” ([Sanz Casado, 1994, p. 31](#)).

Bringing a brief historical review of user studies, [Araújo \(2014\)](#) argues that the tradition of studies in information centers such as libraries, museums and archives emerges as an extension of the traditional/functionalist approach, seen in the past as mere spaces of conservation and storage of books, and becoming nowadays spaces that promote educational and cultural actions to its visitors.

The list of social activities of the information units and their professionals is based on the criticism of functionalist studies, in which they saw people (users) as passive beings, or “mere receptacles of information” ([Araújo, 2014, p. 58](#)). Consequently, it was in the understanding of the role of users as active beings and in the study of their individualities, their different needs and uses that a new tradition of studies became established ([Araújo, 2014](#)).

When examining the evolution of user studies, [Cunha et al. \(2015\)](#) point out that such studies are indeed multifaceted and communicate with other areas of knowledge, such as Communication, Sociology, Anthropology, Informatics, Education, Statistics, Ad-

ministration, among others. For the authors, these studies are essential to know the needs of the demands, examine the informational behaviors, analyze their behaviors, motivations, aspirations, predicting future demands and/or adapting services and products to the given reality ([Cunha et al., 2015, p. 23](#)).

[Pinheiro \(1982, p. 2\)](#) transits the user's explanation as an observed phenomenon, based on understanding, anticipating behavior, controlling the phenomenon and improving the use of information by manipulating conditions essential. The author states that it is necessary to understand the user's behavior, define concepts and theorize the relationships obtained from these studies so that they can go beyond superficiality.

Among the divisions found in the studies of information users, there is the perspective of approaches directed to each study, with the traditional, alternative and interactionist approaches.

Generally, the first approach was characterized by a model in which information is seen as objective and users as passive information processors; the second approach, as opposed to the traditional one, is primarily concerned with feelings, perception, the way people use information to create new knowledge, that is, studies that assess, according to cognitive theorists, which factors interfere in the behavior of searching and using information ([Araújo, 2012](#)); the interactionist approach, on the other hand, consists in overcoming the previous understanding, where the user is a cognitive being, but which needs to be analyzed from other angles and contexts in constant change, taking into account mainly the issues of information needs and demand satisfaction ([Choo, 2006](#)). Therefore, the constructions of thought and senses involve not only objective aspects due to the possible quantitative approach, but also subjective aspects, based on interactionist aspects.

As an example of an interactionist approach, and according as [Ribeiro \(2009, p. 31\)](#), studies of needs and uses are mentioned, which investigate the behavior in the information research process, and which in turn are directly related to the mediation of information, as they are studies that allow the adaptation of the

information unit to the users' informational needs. This adaptation process presupposes a mediation relationship, since understanding these needs, the information professional can equip himself with elements to better serve the users and the community in which he operates, considering that his informational needs become known and identified.

3.2 Mediation of Information

One of the ways to carry out the results of user studies is in making the information professional. In this case, mediation of information can be an effective method to achieve the user's cognitive development. Among the types of mediation, there are several types, to mention: community mediation; cultural mediation; mediation of information; mediation of the cognitive object; mediation of knowledge; social mediation; mediation for peace; body mediation, and others (Bortolin & Santos Neto, 2015). In this way, it is learned that the terminology "mediation" cuts across several areas, with different meanings.

In the area of Information Science, more and more reflections and discussions regarding the mediation of information are encouraged, which has been expanding and improving its theoretical bases over the years. After Bortolin and Santos Neto (2015), although the study of mediation of information in the referred field has received some influence from the area of Social Communication, it appears that mediation comes from the theoretical vacuum of the reference and information service, because despite its significance in the field of Librarianship, required time and space to happen, generally remaining in the supply of materials and limited to strictly physical environments (Almeida Junior & Santos, 2019).

Almeida Junior (2015) sees the mediation of information as any and all interference actions – directly or indirectly; consciously or unconsciously; singularly or plurally; individually or collectively – instituted by a process and conducted by an information professional with the support of informational equipment, aiming in the foreground the appropriation of information that partially and briefly fulfills an informational need, fostering inquiries and new information needs (Almeida Junior, 2015).

Still for the author, there is no mediation exempt from interference, although there is in the literature the defense of the idea of neutrality in making the information professional. However, when a person suffers an interference action by the mediator in order to search for and retrieve information, this person realizes the value of the information expressing ideas, developing arguments, disputing external opinions based on constructed knowledge and skills, critically evaluating information and its implications for society, based on information as a founding pillar (Belluzzo et al., 2014). Effective educational mediation is materialized when the professional persuades "[...] the apprentice of his own competence, instilling him with self-confidence to continue learning, transforming him into an autonomous and independent apprentice" (Dudziak, 2003, p. 33).

With regard to the appropriation of information, it must be thought in terms of the physical availability of the material for access to the contents of these materials and in the sense that the "[...] meanings that have accumulated in the construction of the information are added to the meanings derived from of user" (Almeida Junior, 2015, p. 20). Therefore, the act of appropriating information underlies the change in mental stocks and the baggage of individual knowledge, satisfying their informational needs and making others arise, since we are beings in permanent construction.

Also mentioned is the substantial role of the development of the dialogic, aesthetic, formative and ethical dimensions in the mediation of information. Gomes (2014) approaches that the mediating action sustains the generation of pleasure in the expansion of knowledge, resulting from the search for information and the achievement of autonomy, since it is in mediation where "[...] the sense of sharing, cooperation, openness to dialogue and movement and the exercise of criticism that generates creativity, therefore, this action has a formative dimension" (Gomes, 2014, p. 56). This makes us reflect about the professional's conduct of the mediator: they must be sensitive, ethical, observant and an active participant in social protagonism, occupying a position as an educating agent for the development of competences, skills and attitudes

in information; i.e., should “set an example” for the learner.

Furthermore, the production of knowledge derives precisely from the ability to use, efficiently and effectively, the tools available for identification, recovery of information sources and application of knowledge. This framework of practices enables continuous learning, the formation of critical beings, aware of their role and capable of acting with competence in the most diverse daily and social segments (Almeida & Farias, 2019).

3.3 Information Literacy

Citizenship is synonymous with the social quality of a society organized in rights and duties. In democracy, citizenship is a crucial object. There is no democracy without its main actor: the citizen. Thus, the awakening of citizenship occurs in education, responsible for trying to educate the person, in a scenario of rights and duties (Demo, 1996); where this premise is directly related to what is called information literacy.

The proposal for information literacy is considered pertinent with regard to the symbiotic relationship between the being and the information. For Belluzzo et al. (2015), the term information literacy is undoubtedly linked to learning to learn and critical thinking, charged with developing attitudes and knowledge that are indispensable to discern when information is necessary to assist in the resolution of a problem or in making a decision.

Information and knowledge drive empowerment. According to Gohn (2004), empowerment can refer to the process of mobilizations and practices that seek to promote and drive people, groups and communities to improve their living conditions, increasing their self-esteem. Information and knowledge are, mainly in contemporary times, social assets for the intervention of reality and social transformation when incorporated to the prism of information literacy, reaffirming its process of development, improvement and management of capacities, competences, skills and attitudes that provide people with the skills to use information in practice and direct their actions in any sphere (Vitorino & Piantola, 2019).

Hence, an information-literate society is able to exercise citizenship, that is, people have the ability to distinguish the reliability of information in any context, are able to recognize and use appropriate sources of information and perceive the existing gaps (Ottonicar, Valentim & Feres, 2015).

Considering the social importance of information literacy, and understanding that his studies can focus on the construction of theoretical models under a socio-cultural and intersubjective perspective (Belluzzo et al., 2015; Hicks, 2018), this premise can be effecting it through a perspective that focuses its efforts on investigating how information literacy is shown in the different practices and contexts of communities/social groups, instead of trying to direct the informational actions and understandings of a given group into a previously established model (Hicks, 2018).

Righetto et al. (2018), confirm this premise when pointing out that information literacy needs to be treated in a more dense way regarding social issues, including social movements and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), democracy, human rights, concise and coherent access to information, among others, since learning to learn implies being potentially capable and independent to make simple or complex choices, as well as understanding human disparities and emerging social problems.

Moreover, information literacy is part of the educational process and, therefore, one of the human rights. In contrast, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco, 2009) points out that the coverage of government and non-government programs remains, in general, limited to needs and effective demand, marginalizing of rural, indigenous, Afro-descendant, LGBTQI+, women, migrants, people with special needs and deprived of their freedom by maintaining and increasing exclusion, rather than reducing it.

In the education field, information literacy is directly related to learning to learn and critical sense: it is the grouping of the notion and essential knowledge to discern when information is necessary to solve a problem or for decision making, as much as uniting this exact information in searchable terminologies

and vocabulary, so that, in the sequence, it is possible to locate information effectively, retrieve, understand, structure and evaluate its pertinence and share it with others (Horton Jr., 2016). And more: the information-literate person knows how to benefit from existing knowledge to understand and integrate it into their own knowledge (Lau, 2007). In this confluence, we are referring to an information metaliteracy, covered with dimensions and characteristics that make it fundamental in society.

In the wake of the defense of that literacy, Paul Zurkowski (1974) already foresaw a scenario of changes and recommended that a national movement towards competence in information be initiated. According to his suggestions, information resources should be applied to problem solving, by learning techniques and skills in the use of information access tools (Zurkowski, 1974).

The information literacy movement initiated in the United States has become a social movement, traveled and reached several countries, with the creation of entities, the realization of professional meetings, the implementation of programs and the development of research that led the theme to become one of the most discussed subjects today (Campello, 2003; Vitorino & Piantola, 2019). This movement took place in circumstances peculiar to the North American context, followed by the evolution of educational actions in other settings, but which, in short, has developed and continues to develop today, around four aspects: (1) the information society, (2) the educational theories, (3) the information technology and (4) the information professional (Campello, 2003, p. 28).

Also, Dudziak (2003) and Vitorino and Piantola (2019) points out that this movement has reached worldwide dimensions and is currently focused on learning as a continuous process of internalization of conceptual, attitudinal, behavioral and neural skills foundations necessary for understanding and permanent interaction with the informational and, consequently, social universe.

3.4 Social Vulnerability

Coming from the human rights movement, the term vulnerability was solidified in the 1980s in public health when dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The characteristics of the epidemic, the way it was reaching groups, in different ways and in different countries, made the incidence of the virus to be articulated with the socioeconomic scenario, seeking to infer which social groups and people could be among the possible ones vulnerable to the epidemic. Thus, the terms risks and risk population were gradually replaced by the term vulnerability (Corrêa & Souza, 2011).

The term vulnerability also refers to economic and social exclusion. In this scenario, a person or a group becomes vulnerable when a situation occurs that causes them to break their social bonds with work, family or their circle of relationships (Adorno, 2001). It concerns the possibility of suffering a decline in well-being, in particular a fall below a benchmark or poverty threshold. This decline is caused by shocks against which protection is expensive or not possible. Shocks can affect beings, for example, due to loss or lack of employment, accident or death. They can also attack entire communities, such as villages, regions or particular socio-economic groups (Duclos, 2002).

The vulnerability measure is particularly important for monitoring the well-being of minorities. Because of the already difficult circumstances of these people, the results of the vulnerability are typically more severe for them. They are also often more vulnerable due to their characteristics (i.e., their exposure), including a lower level of assets to protect them, less access to insurance and inputs and output markets (to isolate them), less access to public protection and a lower level of training (Duclos, 2002).

Vulnerability brings with it the idea of seeking first to understand a whole set of elements that characterize the living conditions and possibilities of a person or group – the network of available services, such as schools and health units, health care programs, culture, leisure and professional training, being the actions of the State that promote justice and citizenship among

them – and measure under what circumstances these people have access to the offer (Adorno, 2001).

Thus, vulnerability represents the search for the eradication of prejudices and the possibility of building a new mentality, a new way of perceiving and treating social groups and assessing their living conditions, social protection and security. It is the search for a change of focus in the treatment of the target populations of social programs (Adorno, 2001).

These points about vulnerability aimed at people and the social processes of access (or the lack of them) refer to social vulnerability, a category of vulnerability concerning the structure of society and its components. The first studies in the light of social vulnerability were carried out in order to motivate a broader and more extensive approach that anchored the different modalities of social disadvantage and not just poverty (Corrêa & Souza, 2011).

As Adorno (2001) points out,

[...] more commonly used today by social and human rights movements, the term *social vulnerability* synthesizes the idea of greater exposure and sensitivity of an individual or group to the problems faced in society and reflects a new way of looking and to understand the behaviors of specific people and groups and their relationship and difficulties in accessing social services such as health, school and justice (p. 11, emphasis added).

Despite its frequent discussion over the past decades, this expression does not have a single and consolidated meaning in the literature, denoting its multidimensional and broad character. Proof of this is that for Prowse (2003), while certain studies deal with the intertwined vulnerability to poverty, others define it as an angular symptom of poverty and there are still those who characterize it as one of the dimensions of poverty.

As much as the concepts of unsatisfied basic needs or multidimensional poverty, social vulnerability has been rising according to the authentication that the category of poverty, without its own qualification, is limited and unable to express the complex situations of social malaise (on the opposite welfare state)

to which different groups and populations are subject (Institute of Applied Economic Research, 2018). That said, social vulnerability is configured as social construction, the product of societal transformations, incorporating forms related to historical conditions. Such transformations propel changes in the context of private life, highlighting weaknesses and contradictions (Cutter, 2011).

Social vulnerability is assimilated by the understanding of the dialectical relationship between the external and the internal: the external deals with the reference, while the internal presents itself in the quality of people, groups, places or communities. Internal resources are then considered to be “active” (Kaztman et al., 1999). Assets can be defined as an articulated set of conditions that will infer the quality, quantity and diversity of internal resources, which are ordered by three assets: *physical*, *human* and *social* (Monteiro, 2011).

Physical assets involve substantial means for the pursuit of well-being. They can also be divided into physical capital itself (land, housing, material goods, etc.) or financial capital, including characteristics of high liquidity and multifunctionality, involving credit and forms of insurance and monetary protection. Human assets include work as the main asset and the value added in it by investments in health and education, which determine the greater or lesser physical capacity for work, qualification, etc. (Brasil, 2007). Social assets include networks of reciprocity, trust, contacts and access to information. Under these aspects, the condition of vulnerability considers the situation of people based on the following elements: insertion and stability in the labor market; the weakness of their social relations and, finally, the degree of regularity and quality to public services or other forms of social protection (Brasil, 2007).

It is understood, after to what has been said, that social vulnerability conjectures a mixture of characteristics, material or symbolic resources and abilities inherent to people or groups, which may be insufficient or inadequate to take advantage of social opportunities. The development of this relationship, very possibly, will measure the degree of deterioration in their quality of life (Monteiro, 2011).

Thus, the reduction of the levels of social vulnerability is made possible by the access to goods and services by subordinates, expanding the material and symbolic universe, as well as the conditions of social mobility. An example of a mechanism for social empowerment is provided by the elaboration and implementation of public policies (Monteiro, 2011), divergent from assistentialism.

3.5 User Studies, Mediation of Information and Information Literacy in the Contexts of Social Vulnerability: Building Dialogues

Based on the assumption that mediation and information literacy are processes that focus their concern on the question of appropriation of information, whereas from the internalization of this metaliteracy, the subject is able to critically appropriate information for construction and transforming their knowledge in the direction of empowerment (Almeida Junior & Santos, 2019), we can also include in this list user studies, which, among its functions, consists of investigating and mediating the dynamic phenomena of appropriation, internalization, use and dissemination of information.

When analyzing the context through an interactionist approach, user studies, mediation of information and information literacy can be viewed as actions of interference, while the mediating professional actively interferes in the investigation process of individual learning in order to enable the production of knowledge and the personal satisfaction. In view of this, if user studies examine needs and uses (Ribeiro, 2009), and mediation aims to change the state of individual knowledge, it is through these that the education of users is promoted, in which the professional works by promoting the development of information literacy (Almeida & Farias, 2019).

Therefore, the actions of interference for the development of this triad in the contexts of social vulnerability and social minorities – since these shelter socially oppressed groups – is essential for meeting the information needs of people or groups characterized as socially vulnerable. It is worth noting that such actions can be standardized, but they must not be homogeneous; it is necessary to deal with

empathy, clarification and direction, taking into account that oriented and contextual information can be the driving factor in the inclusion or segregation of the aforementioned physical, human and social assets.

In agreement with the previous premise, Demo (2013) reflects that the subordinate classes in general need the best possible educational proposal, emancipatory, alternative, empowering, not of “leftovers” of democracy that only confirm their “prison in misery”; these groups/beings need to be aware that it is necessary to continue learning throughout their lives, remaining responsible for their own opportunities first, protagonist of their destiny, inventor and responsible for the reins of their future.

Based on the discussions and reflections brought so far, and intending to embody the presented theoretical-conceptual framework, Figure 1 illustrates the possible convergences/dialogues between user studies, mediation of information and information literacy in the contexts of social vulnerability.

From the visualization of figure 1 and the construction of this “possible dialogues”, it is learned that it is pertinent to think of the triad of interference actions (studies, mediation and information literacy) as attributes that can and must relate intrinsically in the contexts of social vulnerability, whereas in user studies, the professional understands the general aspects involved and the information needs, followed by the mediation process, in which the demands, potentialities and difficulties of the demand to be reached are fully understood the development of lifelong learning and the awakening of empowerment, social and individual well-being and protagonism.

The protagonism, in turn, must cover all the actors involved in the process, that is, professionals and groups, as there must be full engagement and commitment of the professional to the apprentice (s), promoting the widening of the dialogic, aesthetic, formative and ethical dimensions.

Another point to be highlighted is that in practice, due to the limitations on access to information and considering the impacts of poverty and social vulnerability, assessments on the reduction of the levels

of vulnerability and poverty have been unambitious, focusing on more limited variables, such as the income or spending behavior of the poor. Traditional methodologies focus on establishing some criteria for identifying the poor and other criteria for assessing aggregate poverty (Barja & Gigler, 2006).

For this reason, the appropriation of information must be seen as not only a source of knowledge, but above all, as a source of expansion of economic, social, political and cultural freedoms. It can be said that access and use of information and communication is an essential condition for development, because it crosses all its dimensions. In the same way, it is understood that information poverty (arising from the absence or the authenticity of available information) and communication is a dimension of vulnerability and poverty, whose main characteristic is to permeate the other dimensions of poverty, so that its reduction effective is interdependent with other dimensions (Britz, 2004).

Information poverty can be defined as the situation in which individuals and communities, within a given

context, do not have the skills, attitudes or material inputs necessary to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it properly. It is also characterized by the lack of access to essential or necessary information in the daily context. When people do not have access to information, they are prevented from incorporating the use of new technologies or simply making better decisions for themselves and those around them. This can lead people to the condition of informational poverty (International Federation of Library Associations, 2018).

Developing such interference actions does not mean molding people or groups to a given social standard, but rather showing that from the appropriation of new information and knowledge attributed to them from the interference process (user studies, mediation of information and information literacy), the viability of exercising effective citizenship is manifested, where it reflects on everyday events, claims rights, fulfills duties and holds the necessary resources to take charge of your own life.

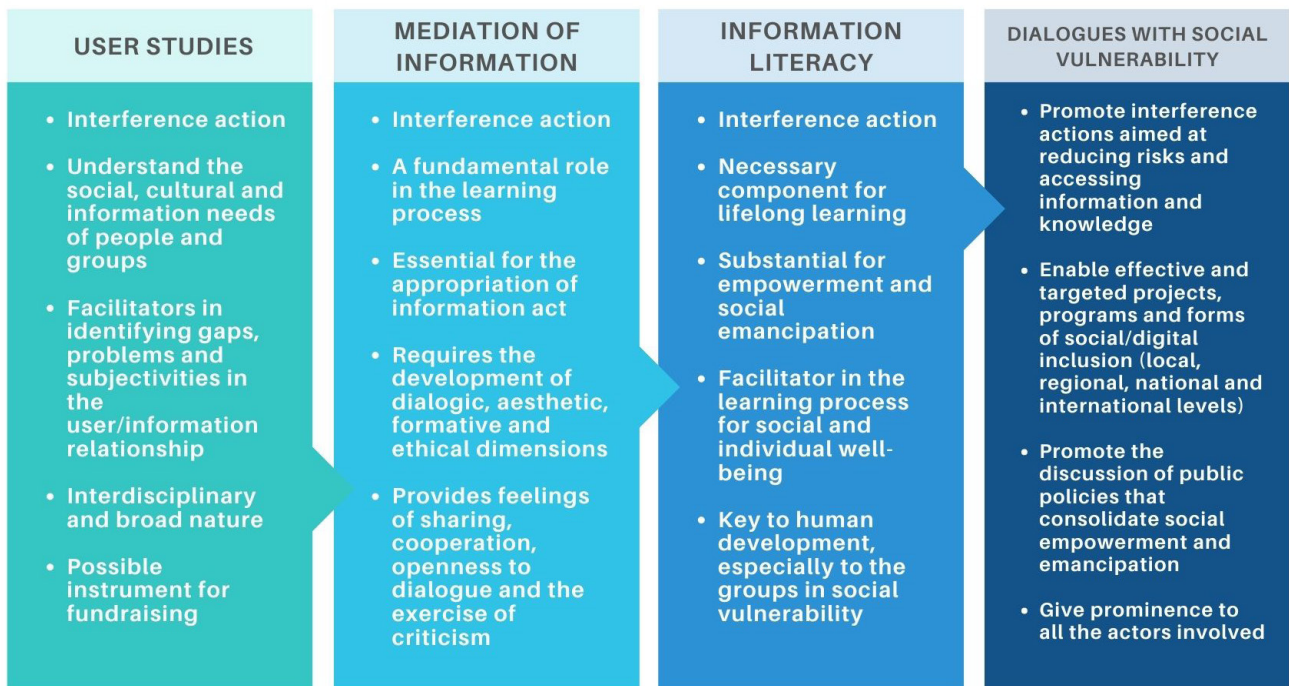


Figure 1. Possible dialogues between user studies, mediation of information and information literacy in the contexts of social vulnerability.

Source: Data obtained in the research (2020).

4. Final Considerations

In this research, the objective was to explain and reflect on the possible relationships between the four themes in order to contribute to the enrichment of discussions in the area. In view of this, the emergence of new related debates or the proposal to create empirical methodologies and practices that encompass the analogy of the themes in question is something quite valid for the area, since these discussions are not conclusive and do not end in themselves; besides, currently, the social perspective of Information Science has been treated with greater emphasis and enthusiasm.

The social role of Information Science and its participants must be supported as a guide in the face of information needs and other existing information gaps of people in situations of social vulnerability. It is necessary to make proposals for sensitization and awareness so that people feel included, involved and motivated to participate in the collaborative construction supported by lifelong learning.

When making the analogy of the possible dialogues between the translated themes, it was observed that the interference actions are quite necessary in making the information professional, as well as the area, especially when talking about the contexts of social vulnerability and in the search for the reduction levels of material and informational poverty.

The act of studying the user(s), measuring them and assisting them in the development of literacies and skills regarding the appropriation of information are the means that provide the interaction between the information professional and the being, that is, among the mediator and the mediated. It is a process that must be worked on intrinsically and in a complementary way, aiming at the protagonism of all the actors involved, proposing and developing methods and actions of social inclusion, which promote “learning to learn” and not a simple welfare plan.

Thereby, user studies, mediation of information and information literacy can be considered as interference actions, as they are concerned with the understanding and formation of critical and reflective citizens in the face of socio-informational realities. The set of these ac-

tions consolidates an investigative posture of both the teacher (the mediator) and the apprentice (the mediated), as it allows for empowerment and emancipation insofar as it appropriates, internalizes, accepts, refuses, associates and reframes information to understand the facts, at the same time that it argues, questions, refutes, detects flaws and possible manipulations in the array of available information.

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