

# How to get a job: Deception in the applicant advice industry

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## INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION

Little research attention has been directed at applicant preparation techniques throughout the hiring process. Professional interview coaching has been examined, but the internet provides an immense amount of freely-available information—none of which has been examined for accuracy or integrity. The current study defines the applicant advice industry as consisting of materials aimed at boosting the performance of applicants within the job interview. The full advice industry is multifaceted, consisting of print materials such as books and magazines, digitally-transmitted materials like podcasts and websites, and instructional sessions with career coaches or seminars.

To narrow the scope, the current study focuses on the digital applicant advice industry. These materials are highly accessible due to their digital nature, and may pose a risk to organizations if utilizing materials artificially inflate an applicant's chances of being hired. This artificial inflation can be understood through categorization of the materials along a faking continuum:



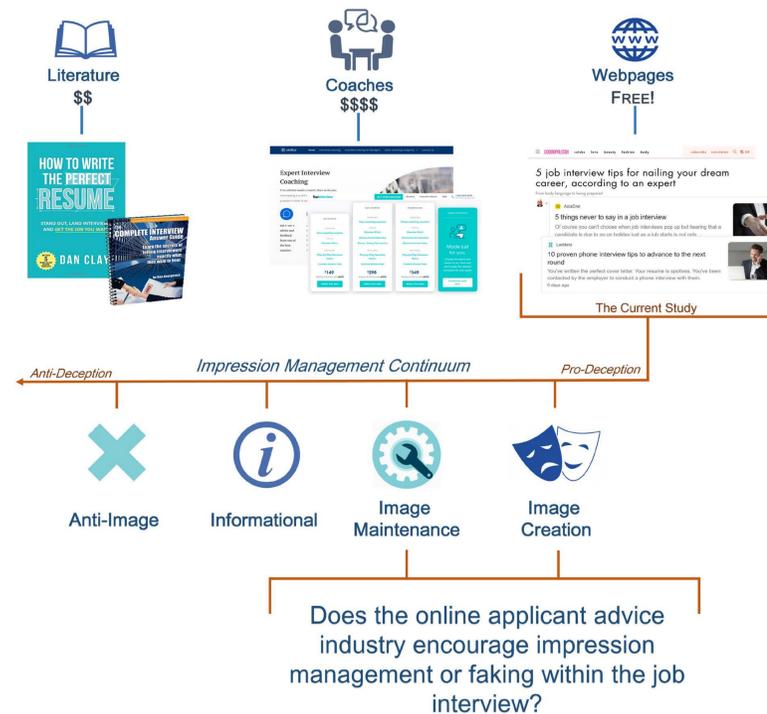
Figure 1: A categorization of advice industry materials, as relevant for the selection process.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1:** What are the composition and characteristics of the digital applicant advice industry?

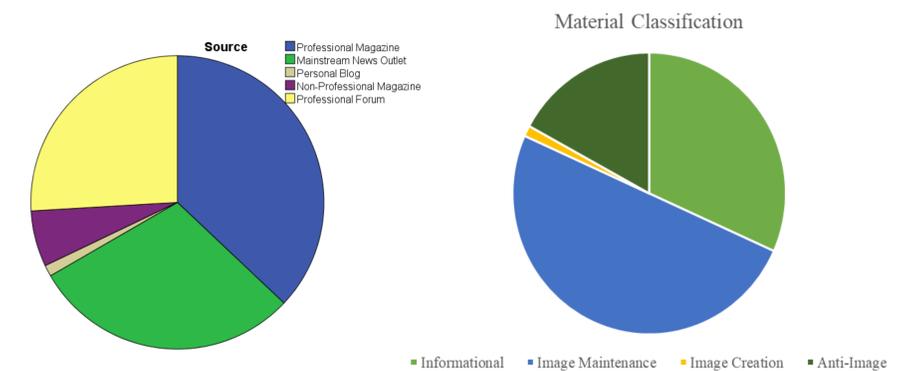
**RQ2:** To what extent does the digital applicant advice industry encourage faking or other duplicitous behaviors?

## The Applicant Advice Industry



## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Preliminary results from April 2017 point to a prevalence of Informational materials and somewhat-prescriptive Image Maintenance materials, with Image Creation materials facing scarce representation in the abbreviated investigation. Materials focused on appropriate answers for popular interview questions (50% of articles), do's and don'ts for leveraging social media in the hiring process (12% of articles), and the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities contributing to successful job interviews (11% of articles). Mainstream news outlets emerged as the second-largest source of advice materials, publishing one-third of coded articles. Initial results suggest the promotion of mild impression management by the advice industry through self-enhancing techniques provided in Image Maintenance materials. Fully categorizing recent advice materials will enable more thorough examination and comparison of online advice materials to research-supported interview techniques. In the absence of other research on this industry, completion of the proposed study will enhance I-O understanding of the magnitude and nature of these materials' impact.



## PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

A team of undergraduate coders will be used to systematically collect, analyze, and categorize online advice articles pertaining to job interviews.

### Sample

Articles freely available through Google from March 2017 to March 2019 will be pulled from search archives, using "job interview advice" as the search terms and specifying one-month publishing ranges.

Preliminary results are available from April 2017 advice materials.

### Coding

Analytic procedures consist of coding the collected articles as containing tips or advice pertaining to the following facets of the job interview:

Questions/Answers	Articles described specific questions discussed in job interviews and appropriate answers
Nonverbal Behavior	Articles interpreted and discussed manipulation of body language and facial expression
Social Media	Article describes managing one's digital presence in online networking spheres
KSA's	Article identifies interview-related skills and attributes deemed favorable for being considered a competitive applicant
Deception	Article advocates for lying in a job interview
IM-Positive	Article advocates for impression management in a job interview
Pro-Honesty*	Article advocates for honestly representing oneself in the job interview

### Classification

All articles will be classified along the deception continuum, ranging from informational to image creation.

**Informational Materials:** the article's primary purpose is to inform the reader, such as to common interviewing procedures or a question favored by recruiters

**Image Maintenance Materials:** articles that...

- were published with the stated goal of achieving a positive hiring outcome
- contained both descriptive and prescriptive job interview information
- expressed favorable opinions toward self-enhancement

**Image Creation Materials:** the article expressed a favorable view towards lying in the job interview, or advocated for outright deception

**Anti-Image Materials\*:** the article specifically advised against deception or impression management, instead supporting honest self-representation in the interview

\*These categories were not originally anticipated, but emerged during preliminary coding

## DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Over half of the articles included descriptions of questions commonly asked within the job interview; ideal answers were also provided in cases where the article was classified as an image maintenance material. Despite the scarcity of image creation materials, half of the materials sampled either focused primarily on promoting a positive hiring outcome or demonstrated favorable opinions impression management techniques, classifying the articles as image maintenance materials. This finding is interesting, considering that small levels of impression management (in the form of self-promotion or enhancement) has been found to benefit candidates in the job interview context, indicating that image maintenance materials may prove more influential over hiring outcomes than more deceptive categories (Swider et al., 2011).

### Limitations:

The current study remains observational in nature, and therefore cannot determine whether any materials' endorsement of deception causally influences an applicant's motivation or ability to "fake" within the selection context. In addition, when faced with the enormity of the corporate advice industry, this paper necessarily focused solely on the digitally-propagated applicant advice subsector of the industry. Further research should expand this frame to include headhunters, career coaches, printed materials, and more to provide a clearer idea of the true nature and impact of this industry. However, the proposed study will illuminate an area of applicant interview preparation, paving the way for future investigation into the full breadth and impact of this industry.

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