

Barriers To E-Commerce Advertising Adoption: A Qualitative Study of Sellers on an Indonesian Marketplace

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ABSTRACT

Despite digital advertising becoming increasingly important in providing business advantages, many sellers in Indonesia remain hesitant to adopt e-commerce advertising tools. This study investigates the main barriers that prevent sellers from using advertising features on a major Indonesian marketplace. A qualitative approach was applied through semi-structured interviews with ten sellers, including current users, former users, and non-users. This study offers a novel contribution by exploring seller resistance from an experience-based perspective, which has not been widely examined in existing adoption research. The study uses a framework analysis method to identify eight main barriers, including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, price value, habit, personal innovativeness, and digital advertising literacy. While most sellers found the platform easy to use, concerns about performance outcomes, cost justification, and lack of advanced knowledge limited adoption. Social factors and marketing preferences also influenced seller decisions. To strengthen the findings, this study employs a triangulation method by comparing the qualitative results with a previous quantitative study. This approach provides a clearer view of seller adoption behavior by confirming key factors and highlighting both aligned and differing insights. These findings provide a deeper understanding of why some sellers resist using e-commerce advertising and emphasize the need to address barriers and concerns to encourage broader adoption of these tools.

KEYWORDS *E-commerce Advertising, Adoption Barriers, Digital Marketing, Seller Behavior, Technology Resistance*



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the biggest e-commerce markets in the world, contributing 3% of global market share. With 2.9 million of sellers selling online through e-commerce platforms (BPS, 2023), the competition in the marketplace becomes more difficult. Therefore, businesses or sellers need to have a competitive advantage to be able to compete in the market and increase

their market share to grow further (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Gale et al., 2013; Gilster et al., 2019; Guo, 2024; Indrawati & Primasari, 2016). One of the approaches is to promote their offerings through digital advertising, thus being able to reach wider potential customers (Irawan, 2024; Jain et al., 2021; Kabir et al., 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kristi et al., 2024).

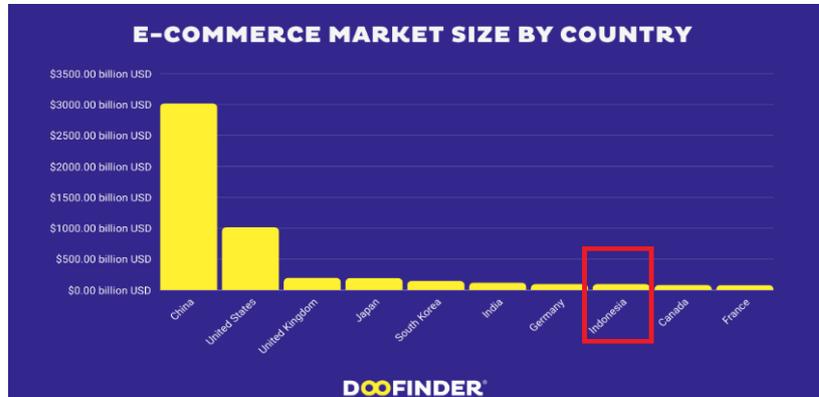


Figure 1. E-commerce market size by country in 2024 (Doofinder, 2024).

Digital advertising is growing rapidly globally, driven by changes in consumer behavior toward online shopping and digital content consumption. In 2024, global digital ad spend is forecasted to reach USD 667.6 billion, accounting for 68.9% of total media advertising spending. It highlights that more than half of total media advertising spending is allocated to digital ads. A similar trend is shown in Indonesia, where Indonesia’s digital advertising market size is projected to reach USD 3.23 billion in 2025, up from USD 3.05 billion in 2024.

Indonesia Digital Advertising Market
Market Size in USD Billion
CAGR 5.77%

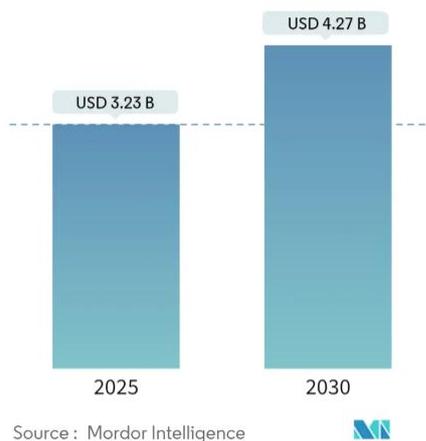


Figure 2. Indonesia digital advertising market (Mordor Intelligence).

Additionally, the digital ad spends grew by 12.1% in 2023, making Indonesia one of the top ten countries with the highest digital ad spending growth worldwide. These highlights the potential of digital advertising in Indonesia, driving businesses to grow in competitive digital markets.

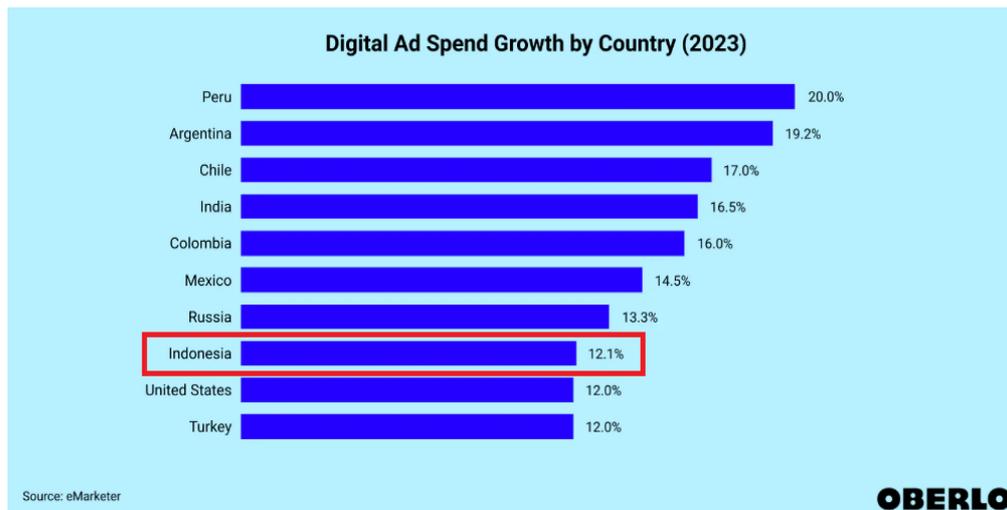


Figure 3 Digital ad spend growth by country in 2023 (Oberlo).

Although digital advertising is growing, seller adoption of in-platform advertising tools on Indonesian e-commerce platforms remains relatively low and has continued to decline in recent months. This study explores the main factors that prevent sellers from using these advertising tools, with a focus on one major Indonesian e-commerce platform (Suryani et al., 2021; Venkatesh et al., 2012; Vogl et al., 2019; Yerzi et al., 2024; Zahra et al., 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted the role of digital advertising in enhancing seller competitiveness, but with different emphases and limitations (Prasetyaningrum & Hilaliyah, 2022; Sahid & Hazan, 2024; Salmadewi, 2025; Saunders et al., 2023; Subawa et al., 2020). For example, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2020) found that digital advertising increases market visibility and customer acquisition, yet their study primarily focused on developed markets where infrastructure and adoption levels are high, making the findings less applicable to Indonesian SMEs. Similarly, Nugroho et al. (2021) examined Indonesian SMEs' use of digital platforms and confirmed that advertising tools can improve sales performance, but their research relied heavily on survey-based quantitative data without exploring the behavioral barriers sellers face in practice.

This study offers a novel contribution by focusing on the behavioral barriers faced by sellers, an area that remains underexplored in the existing technology adoption research (Kwarteng et al., 2023; Laksono & Darma, 2023). It also integrates a triangulation analysis by comparing previous quantitative findings, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of seller resistance (Amin et al., 2023; Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Astuti & Nasution, 2014; Budiarto, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The scope of this study is limited to one e-commerce platform and does not include advertising on external channels such as social media or search engines (Adeoye, 2023; AlSharji et al., 2018; Alvionita & Ie, 2021). Data were collected through interviews with Indonesian sellers between February and May 2025. While the findings offer useful insights into seller behavior and the reasons for hesitating to adopt in-platform ads, the results may not be widely generalizable due to the limited sample size and the specific platform studied.

This research seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for low adoption, with the practical benefit of offering recommendations for platform providers and policymakers to design more seller-friendly ad ecosystems. Ultimately, these efforts aim to strengthen the competitiveness of Indonesian SMEs in the global digital market.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the barriers that prevented sellers from adopting e-commerce advertising features. A deductive approach was applied, drawing on key themes identified in earlier studies on digital tool adoption and seller behavior.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of sellers from a major Indonesian e-commerce platform. The interviews explored sellers' perspectives, experiences, and challenges in using in-platform advertising tools. Participants were selected to represent different categories of usage: sellers who were currently using ads, sellers who had never used ads, and sellers who had stopped using ads. This selection ensured that diverse perspectives from each user category were captured.

The data were analyzed using framework analysis, which involved transcription, familiarisation, coding, developing and applying an analytical framework, summarizing the data into a matrix, and interpreting the results (Gale et al., 2013).

Interviews were conducted with ten sellers representing varied experiences of ad platform usage.

Table 1. Interview participant profile

	Usage of Ads Platform	Business Operational Duration	Business Size	Product Category
Participant 1	Never used	4 years	Small	Toys and Hobbies
Participant 2	Currently using	5 years	Large	Kitchenware
Participant 3	Previously used ads, but have stopped	16 years	Small	Men Fashion
Participant 4	Never used	4 years	Small	Men Fashion
Participant 5	Previously used ads, but have stopped	5 years	Small	Toys and Hobbies
Participant 6	Currently using	9 years	Large	Sports
Participant 7	Previously used ads, but have stopped	6 years	Small	Food and Beverages
Participant 8	Never used	3 years	Small	Electronics
Participant 9	Previously used ads, but have stopped	1 year	Small	Electronics
Participant 10	Previously used ads, but have	5 years	Medium	Mom and Baby

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Interview Result

The goal of the interviews conducted with sellers in the e-commerce platform is to explore deeper insights and understand the reasons behind their behaviors and barriers related to using the ads platform. The interviews were analyzed using framework analysis to help capture sellers' personal experiences, opinions, and suggestions toward the ads platform.

The analysis is divided into themes that provide insights into the factors influencing the adoption as well as the sellers' behavior and perception toward the ads platform. Participant's response is labeled with a code that captures its key meaning based on a predefined theme. Based on this, the data is charted into a framework matrix to compare responses across interview participants, which is then followed by interpreting the findings by examining similarities, differences, and patterns across participants (Lilya & Pasaribu, 2024; Malhotra, 2010; Mutiara et al., 2021; Nurjannah et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2016).

Performance Expectancy

1. Perceived Ads Effectiveness

The perceived effectiveness of the ads platform is a major driver of adoption. In general, sellers believe that the ads platform is a useful tool for improving business results. Ads are considered to have enhanced product awareness, drove more traffic, and eventually increased sales. For example, Participant 3 and 7 explained that ads usage helped drive buyer traffic by increasing product exposure in search results. Similarly, Participant 2 emphasized the strategic value of ads to improve GMV and measuring marketing outcomes, particularly through return on ad spend (ROAS). Participant 2 also mentioned the impact of banner ads in building brand awareness and audience targeting, which these advantages are harder to achieve through product ads alone. These values drive them to use the ads platform.

Participant 1 further highlighted the value of cross-platform visibility, which providing exposure besides the e-commerce platform (e.g., on Facebook) could engage a wider audience, especially older users. Supporting this view, Participant 6 added that ads are especially helpful in reaching new customers and enhancing brand awareness, particularly in markets where the brand is still growing. In line with this, Participant 10 stated that ads significantly increased visibility and helped build brand presence on the platform.

2. Performance Transparency

Although sellers saw the potential of ads performance, clearer performance metrics reporting are also needed. Participants highlighted the importance of comprehensive performance reports that provide insights into which ads perform best and the optimal times to run ads. Participant 3 suggested that having insights by product category and peak shopping periods, such as before Eid for clothing products, would help sellers, especially for smaller sellers to be able to maximize their limited budgets. Participant 7 also suggested

adding more analytics, such as data on audience demographics, to empower sellers in campaign optimization.

3. Initial Performance Expectations

Particularly when they initially started using ads, sellers stated that they wanted it to have an immediate impact. Participant 1 suggested that a free trial for one week would be helpful for sellers to experience the benefits of the ads before committing financially. In addition, Participant 4 mentioned that forecast of the ads results can help sellers to estimate the return that they can get. This is also supported by Participant 8, in which information of how ads can generate engagement can be useful for them. If ads can show visible benefits, sellers are more likely to continue using the platform. Sellers believe that initial visibility and sales are critical for encouraging continued ad usage.

Effort Expectancy

1. Ease of Use

Overall, sellers perceive the ads platform to be user-friendly and easy to use, although beginners may require more assistance at first. Participant 3 described the learning curve as manageable once sellers became familiar with the platform. He also mentioned the need for beginner-friendly suggestions, such as recommendations on optimal ad times and targeting product categories, particularly this will be beneficial to those sellers who are less familiar with data analysis.

Sellers also valued the easy-to-understand performance reporting that enabled them to assess the effectiveness of their ads. Participant 2 shared that they conduct periodic reviews on their ads' performance and experiment with different ad types. This trial and error process enables them to adjust their strategies and optimize their ad campaigns based on real-time data, so they can track performance easily and adjust accordingly without requiring advanced technical skills. In addition, Participant 4 also mentioned the ads interface as intuitive and emphasized that simplicity has a significant role in decreasing the barrier to adopt the feature.

Social Influence

1. Competitor Influence

Competitor influence is a significant factor in sellers' decision to use the ads platform. Most of the participants emphasized that they closely monitored their competitors and their advertising strategies. Participants 1, 2, 9, and 10 mentioned that seeing competitors use ads led them to consider adopting ads themselves. Sellers feel a sense of pressure to stay competitive, especially when they observe bigger sellers gaining a competitive edge through ads. This is also emphasized by Participant 3 about the domino effect, in which when larger sellers use ads, smaller sellers are driven to do the same because of the fear of losing competitiveness. Similarly, Participant 6 shared that tracking competitors' ad placements and bidding behaviors on the e-commerce platform influenced how their team allocated ads budgets and planned campaigns.

2. Peer Influence

Peer recommendations also have a significant influence to encourage sellers to use ads. Participant 2 highlighted that their agency recommended using ads, and they often saw other brands adopting ads consistently. This peer influence helps to normalize ad usage within business networks. Sellers often trust peer advice and success stories from within their industry or network, leading them to follow similar strategies.

Facilitating Conditions

1. Sufficient Platform Support

Several participants found the existing support provided by the platform, such as customer service, articles, and other educational materials are sufficient in helping them use the ads feature. Participants 1, 7, and 9 stated that the current support from the platform was quite helpful. Participant 10 also expressed that the support offered was sufficient, though there was still room for improvement in explaining features more clearly.

2. Practical Learning

Several sellers mentioned that they prefer to learn by doing and enjoy the hands-on experience with ads. Participant 3 emphasized that he figured things out himself, though initial help from educational materials and webinars was occasionally useful. Participants 4 and 5 shared a similar statement, in which they prefer to figure things out on their own rather than relying on support from the platform. This finding suggests that learning by doing is a common practice among sellers, although structured training might be beneficial for those who require more formal support.

3. Personalized Support

The need for personalized support was also emphasized by participant 2, who highlighted the value of having a dedicated Relationship Manager (RM) from the platform, rather than relying on generic resources such as articles. This personalized assistance allows sellers to receive direct answers to their questions and better understand how to optimize their ads. The hands-on support from the dedicated RM was seen as important to help sellers maximize their ads' potential, especially when dealing with complex problems.

Price Value

1. Cost and ROI Concerns

Sellers' perspectives on the ads cost vary. Many sellers highlight that pricing is a significant barrier, particularly when it comes to smaller businesses. Participant 1 expressed concern that ads were not worth the cost for small shops, although he recognized that ads might be affordable for larger businesses. Many sellers felt that pricing models should be adjusted based on shop size. He suggests providing free trials or lower costs for new or small businesses. Similarly, Participant 3 also emphasized that smaller sellers with limited audience reach can benefit from more targeted ads that can be offered with a more affordable price. He shared that the expensive price was the reason to stop using ads.

In comparison to other similar platforms, the ads platform was seen as relatively expensive, with lower return on ad spend (ROAS). Participant 2 mentioned that the cost per click is much higher than on other e-commerce platforms, which results in a lower ROAS.

Participant 5 also acknowledged the high cost of ads but considered it is acceptable when used in corporate settings with a larger budget.

Participants 7 and 9 added that the current pricing model can be challenging for small sellers because currently ads are charged based on clicks regardless of actual conversions. They suggested it would be fairer to use a different pricing structure, such as only charging when a purchase is made.

2. Value for Money

The perceived value of ads is closely related to the seller's ability to generate sufficient returns from their ad spend. Participant 7 stated that whether the cost is worth it depends on the product being advertised. Similarly, Participant 10 explained that ads are valuable when the product already has bigger sales. Despite the current price being considered as expensive, Participants 2 and 5 emphasized that it is still worth the price considering the return that they gained. In summary, sellers evaluate the price value of ads not only based on the absolute cost, but also whether those costs contribute to measurable business results.

Habit

1. Ads Usage Routine

Some sellers use the ads platform on a situational basis, mainly during product launches or special campaigns. Participant 3 shared that sometimes he only activates ads when introducing a new product or during a seasonal situation. This indicates that ads are not part of the daily business operations but rather used as a short-term promotional tool. This suggests that ad usage may still be seen as an optional enhancement rather than a consistent marketing strategy embedded into daily practice.

2. Digital Ads Usage on Other Platforms

Seller behavior varies regarding the use of multiple platforms. Participants 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 mentioned that they run ads on various digital advertising platforms, which shows a tendency toward multi-channel advertising behavior. This reflects a more advanced advertising level and a need to maximize reach across audiences. In contrast, Participants 3 and 9 reported not using other platforms. Participant 3 emphasized that the audience of the e-commerce platform is more intention-driven. This means that buyers come to the platform with clear purchase intentions, thus aligning well with the products he sold since it is quite segmented. This highlights how sellers tailor their ad strategies based on where their target market is most active and how products are discovered.

3. Influence of Previous Experience on Adoption

Although many participants had experience using digital advertising tools on other platforms, this did not necessarily lead them to adopt ads. For example, Participants 2 and 4 emphasized that while they use several platforms, their choice to use ads is based on the platform's own features and relevance, not on previous experience. Similarly, Participant 3 felt confident to try ads independently regardless of past experience because the platform was easy to explore. Participant 5 shared that experience with other platforms does not really influence because their advertising goal is to advertise across many channels. This indicates

that regular use of other platforms does not necessarily lead to dependency to adopt since sellers assess each platform individually based on its own features.

Personal Innovativeness

1. Marketing Method Preference

Sellers show different levels of willingness to try new digital marketing tools, often influenced by their business size, comfort with risk, and their business strategies. For instance, Participant 3 preferred traditional methods like offering discounts or promoting through social media. They were concerned about spending their budget wisely and avoiding waste, which suggests a more cautious mindset. This approach is common among small businesses that want to limit financial risk and are less likely to try unfamiliar tools.

In contrast, Participant 2 was more open to innovation, in which she preferred digital advertising over traditional promotions. They felt more confident using new features to improve business outcomes. Similarly, Participant 10 shared that their business is moving away from relying on discounts. They believed that frequent discounting could train customers to expect low prices, making digital ads a more sustainable option over time.

On the other hand, Participants 6 and 7 took a more flexible approach by using both traditional and digital marketing depending on the situation. They recognized the importance of following new marketing trends while still depending on proven strategies. Overall, while some sellers are quick to adopt digital marketing innovations, others remain cautious unless the benefits are clear. These differences show different levels of openness to change and available resources among different types of sellers.

Digital Advertising Literacy

1. Confidence in Digital Ads Usage

Many sellers expressed confidence in using the ads platform. Participant 1, representing a tech-savvy and younger generation, shared that the platform was easy to navigate, which reflects how generational familiarity with technology can lower adoption barriers. Participant 2 stated that even without agency support, they could interpret performance reports and make strategic decisions based on metrics provided by the platform. Similarly, Participants 3 and 10 rated their confidence level as 7 out of 10, showing that they felt capable of understanding ads performance and using it to optimize campaigns. On the other hand, Participants 4 and 5 expressed lower confidence in using ads since the environment has become more competitive, thus more advanced knowledge and skills are needed.

2. Need for Ads Optimization Knowledge

Despite their overall confidence, several participants emphasized the need for more advanced guidance to optimize ad performance. Participant 7 suggested the platform could be improved by offering deeper analytics, such as audience demographics to help sellers understand and optimize their ad strategies. Participant 6 proposed to have category trend and peak buyers' shopping time insight to maximize their advertising budget. These insights show that while sellers are confident in basic ad operations, they still need clearer and more advanced information to fully optimize their campaigns.

Comparison Between Quantitative and Qualitative Results

This section presents a triangulation analysis comparing the qualitative findings of this study with a previously quantitative study about e-commerce advertising adoption conducted by Salmadewi (2025). The quantitative research tested seller adoption of e-commerce advertising using the UTAUT3 framework and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The objective of this triangulation is to explore areas where the findings converge, complement, or diverge from one another. Converge means two or more sources say similar things, and one supports or backs up the other’s findings. Complement means the sources add to each other, giving a more complete view. It can be applied when quantitative and qualitative data offer different but not conflicting insights. Besides, the result can also diverge due to the contradicting results (Vogl et al., 2019).

Table 2. Triangulation analysis

Variable	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data	Triangulation
Performance Expectancy	Path coefficient: 0.361 T-stat: 2.867 P-value: 0.004 (Significant)	Sellers perceive ads as useful for visibility, traffic, and growth. They expect more immediate and effective results, as well as clearer reporting.	Convergent since both data sources show that performance expectancy is a key driver. Sellers are willing to adopt ads if the value is clear and measurable for their businesses.
Effort Expectancy	Path coefficient: -0.314 T-stat: 1.331 P-value: 0.183 (Not Significant)	Platform is generally seen as easy to use and this convenience can help them in effectively using the features, but some still request clearer guidance and tips for usage, especially for beginners.	Divergent since qualitative results suggest that ease of use matters, however quantitative shows no significant effect. The usability matters but may not strongly impact intention to adopt ads.
Social Influence	Path coefficient: 0.284 T-stat: 2.083 P-value: 0.037 (Significant)	Peer influence is driving sellers’ decision to adopt ads, but competitive pressure has a stronger influence in sellers’ decision to advertise. Seeing other sellers succeed with ads motivates others to adopt similar strategies.	Convergent since both data highlights that social influence is a strong driver. Peer influence and especially competitive pressure significantly influence adoption.
Facilitating Conditions	Path coefficient: -0.050 T-stat: 0.296 P-value: 0.767 (Not Significant)	While sellers value support from the platform such as RM and educational materials, many prefer to do self-learning. These supports are useful, but not always critical for adoption.	Divergent since facilitating conditions is valued in qualitative results, but not significant quantitatively. Platform support helps sellers, but it is not the main factor that drives intention to adopt.

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Variable	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data	Triangulation
Price Value	Path coefficient: 0.273 T-stat: 2.295 P-value: 0.022 (Significant)	Cost is a concern for sellers, particularly smaller businesses. Return on investment, margin, and business size can affect perceived ad value. Clearer ROI and affordable costs are important considerations.	Convergent since both data sources agree that price perception strongly affects adoption. Sellers are price sensitive and want to get results that justify the cost.
Habit	Path coefficient: -0.011 T-stat: 0.129 P-value: 0.898 (Not Significant)	Some sellers use ads only during specific occasions. Sellers tailor ad strategies based on audience behavior, with some using multiple platforms and others focusing on the platform's intention-driven users. Past experience on other platforms does not directly affect the decision to use ads.	Convergent since both data sources show that habitual behavior does not influence adoption of the ads platform.
Personal Innovativeness	Path coefficient: 0.111 T-stat: 1.198 P-value: 0.231 (Not Significant)	Some sellers are eager to try new digital tools, while others stick with familiar methods like social media promotions or discounts. The approach varies by business type and risk tolerance.	Complementary since qualitative results show diverse behaviors, however statistical effect is weak. Innovativeness may shape sellers' attitudes but not directly drive adoption intention.
Digital Advertising Literacy	Path coefficient: 0.107 T-stat: 0.950 P-value: 0.342 (Not Significant)	Many sellers, especially younger or tech-savvy, feel confident in managing ads. However, they still mentioned the need for better optimization tools to maximize results.	Complementary since sellers have the confidence to manage ads based on qualitative data, but the statistical effect is weak based on the quantitative analysis. This indicates that digital advertising literacy has a positive effect on intention to adopt. However, the factor alone is not sufficient. It has to be supported by perceived value and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study identified performance expectancy, price value, and social influence—along with personal innovativeness and digital advertising literacy—as the key barriers preventing sellers from adopting e-commerce advertising tools on a major Indonesian digital marketplace. While the platform was generally user-friendly, small-scale and first-time sellers voiced concerns about uncertain returns on investment, high costs, and insufficient onboarding

support, highlighting that perceptions of value and economic constraints outweigh technical usability in shaping adoption decisions. By uncovering the interplay between behavioral, experiential, and financial factors, the research achieved its objective and complemented prior quantitative studies with qualitative depth, offering actionable recommendations for improving pricing models, transparency, and seller support. Future research should broaden the scope to multiple platforms, conduct cross-industry comparisons, and adopt longitudinal methods to capture evolving seller behaviors and provide a more comprehensive picture of digital advertising adoption in emerging markets.

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