

Marketing Technology, Market-Sensing Capability and Export Upgrading in African Agricultural Value Chains: Towards a Digital Upgrading Capability Framework

Olufemi Afolabi

Footprint School of Business, UK

Abstract

Global value chains (GVCs) have transformed international trade by fragmenting production across dispersed networks of firms. While GVC participation offers opportunities for market access and upgrading, many African agricultural exporters remain concentrated in low-value segments marked by limited value capture and weak bargaining power. Existing explanations of upgrading emphasise governance structures, technological capability and institutional quality, but give little attention to how digital capabilities influence firms' ability to move into higher-value activities. This chapter addresses this gap by integrating Global Value Chain Theory, Market-Sensing Capability Theory, Dynamic Capability Theory and marketing capability literature to develop a Digital Upgrading Capability Framework. The review synthesises evidence on marketing technology, market sensing, export upgrading and value chains to explain how digital marketing enhances firms' capability to acquire, interpret and use market intelligence. It argues marketing technology contributes to upgrading indirectly via market-sensing capability, enabling firms to respond to buyer requirements, achieve standards compliance, and integrate into higher-value segments. Particular attention is given to African cocoa, coffee and cashew chains, where asymmetries between production and value capture constrain development. The chapter positions market-sensing capability as the missing link between marketing technology and export upgrading, offering a framework and practical insights for managers and policymakers.

Keywords: Global Value Chains; Marketing Technology; Market-Sensing Capability; Export Upgrading; Dynamic Capabilities; African Agricultural Value Chains