Johan Kask (b. 1980) is a doctoral candidate and lecturer in marketing. He is a member of the Program for Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship (PRIME) at Örebro University School of Business and the Swedish research school of Management and IT (MIT). His research interest is in the areas of relationship marketing and industrial marketing, with an auxiliary curiosity for the philosophy of science. Specifically, Johan Kask is interested in the evolution of business relationships and markets.

In this thesis, Johan Kask takes an explorative stance and examines in what way a research approach on the basis of Darwinism in a generalized form and systems thinking offers an alternative way for dealing with the difficulties of explaining business relationships and their evolution.

It is often said that firms can hardly be successful without beneficial relationships with other firms. Contemporary marketing and management know a great deal about the important characteristics of beneficial business relationships and how firms excel in gaining a competitive edge from them, but ask for a coherent theory that responds to “how do business relationships and their characteristics arise and transmute over time?” returns fewer suggestions.

By pointing out the kinship between Generalized Darwinism and the set of tenets underlying systems thinking, the thesis submits that business relationships conceptualized as Darwinian systems offer an important starting point to explain evolution, under the premise that business relationships are seen as open and complex systems to fit the qualification criteria for being the units of selection/evolution in a Darwinian explanation.

A Darwinian framework is discussed, a novel conceptualization of business relationships based on the Darwinian genotype-phenotype duality is outlined, and the importance of business relationships’ fit and evolvability to endure and feed back benefits to partners is demonstrated. Overall, the author hopes with this contribution to help stimulate a debate about a Darwinian paradigm in marketing. Read it and agree, or read it and disagree.