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Letter: Don’t give space billionaires control over internet services

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In their interview with Josef Aschbacher, the new director-general of the European Space Agency, Peggy Hollinger and Clive Cookson address just a few of the problems that we may be facing if we allow billionaires and private companies to encase our tiny planet in layers of fast-flying, low-earth orbiting satellites (“Musk is being left to make up rules for space economy, says European agency”, [Interview](#), December 6).

While policymakers focus on the implications for astronomy, space junk, and the monopolisation of orbital planes, they largely ignore the consequences for the internet service provider side of the operation. The dynamics of internet infrastructure and regulations will change when one private ISP is operating globally.

While the US Federal Communications Commission and the International Telecommunication Union regulate frequency allocation and the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs deals with many other space operations issues, neither is equipped, nor ready, to deal with network neutrality or ISP-related concerns.

But there are lots of questions that remain unanswered even as billionaire space cowboys launch their rockets. Will billions of new internet users be brought online only to be put into yet another “walled garden” or echo chamber?

Elon Musk owns Starlink, the satellite internet service run by SpaceX, his private rocket company. But what if future owners of Starlink decide to filter or redirect traffic?

Jeff Bezos’s Blue Origin is getting ready to launch a similar constellation of internet delivering satellites. Will one’s internet usage become yet another input for Amazon’s recommendation engine? Will Shopify stores be blocked or simply unknown to Blue Origin’s users?

Or will a planned Russian-based system be offered free to western countries while its true purpose is to serve as yet another tool for spycraft?

Planetary-scale ISPs are something new: ISPs with worldwide coverage whose services don’t have to be defined by borders. Our leaders should seize this opportunity to set a new global standard for open, unfettered internet access that respects human rights and empowers individuals.

We can’t leave it up to the space cowboys like Musk, Bezos and Richard Branson.

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