



The Abbey

KINDNESS

Elon Musk's Starlink initiative: an act of kindness or a monopoly on technology?



# Elon Musk's Starlink initiative: an act of kindness or a monopoly on technology?

Is Elon Musk's Starlink initiative about kindness or money, power, and control? Starlink is a satellite constellation that aims to deliver global internet coverage. Elon Musk hopes that "Starlink will bring internet access to some 3 billion people who were previously unable to access the internet easily" and it currently provides service in 36 countries. Does this initiative come from the kindness of his heart or a motive to obtain money?

Access to the internet is something you may regard as normality as opposed to a privilege, since it has integrated into your everyday life. However, only 54% of people have access to the internet globally and this is a problem that Starlink aims to tackle. This constellation of low earth orbit satellites uses radio signals in contrast to the conventional cable/fibre optic technology, hence allowing it to create a computer network that is optimised to process a very high volume of data with minimal delay. It allows rural, less populated areas to access reliable internet.

This supports the idea of the Starlink initiative as an act of kindness, as it gives that helping hand to developing countries by allowing them to access something which the developed world considers to be routine. Musk gave satellite access to Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale war. Starlink's use of radio signals meant that they couldn't be jammed, consequently allowing armed forces to have stable and operational communications between headquarters and the frontline military. Starlink

aided Ukraine not only on the battlefield but also back home as it played a crucial role in the rapid restoration of communications. With technology becoming more prevalent in modern times, it plays a crucial role in war.

On the other hand, was Musk's true motive to be kind? The richest man on the planet considered stopping funding Starlink in Ukraine because he was losing around \$20 million a month as he believed that the US Military should be responsible for funding Ukraine instead. However, according to Ukrainian Activist Melaniya Poddyak, "thousands" of Ukrainians were paying Musk's company monthly as she showed her bank account with more than £6,000 in outgoing payments to Starlink. Musk has a net worth of nearly \$200bn and his company SpaceX has predicted annual revenue of \$30bn from Starlink. So why does a comparatively measly \$20mn a month make him reconsider his choice to help the country and save lives? Is it truly an act of kindness if the ultimate motive is money?

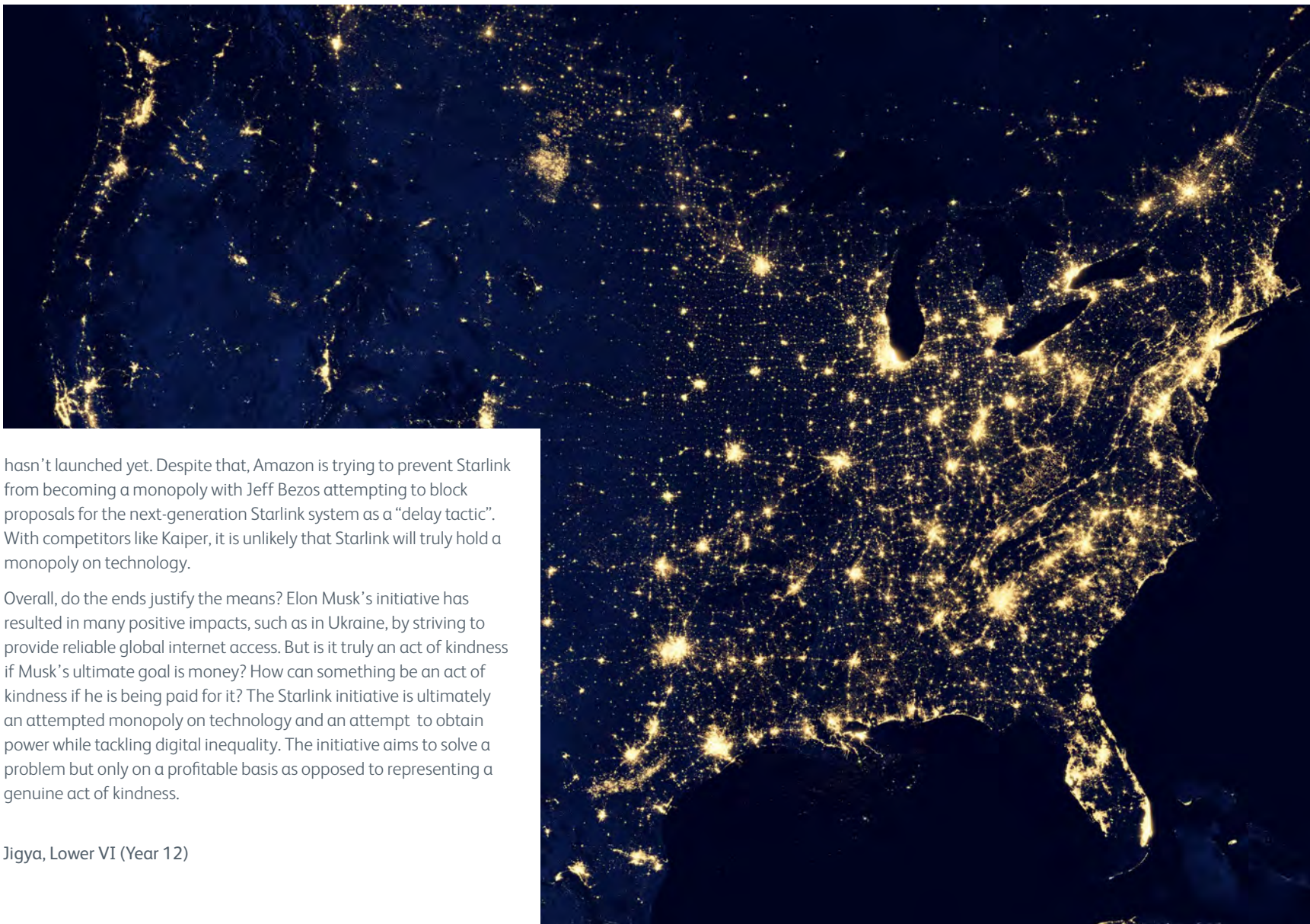


Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/AP

Additionally, Musk angered Ukrainian leaders by suggesting that Ukraine ought to acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and other annexed regions to establish peace. He believes this to be the only solution to "de-escalate the situation". This shows how Musk is utilising the Starlink initiative as a means to becoming politically involved in Ukraine as he strives for something other than money - power.

There is also a possibility that Starlink will have exclusive possession or control of supply in technology - a monopoly. Arguably, Starlink can't become a monopoly because there are so many other internet service providers present already. However, this isn't the case in many rural areas where internet connectivity is unreliable or unavailable hence making Starlink stand out as it takes control. Starlink's two main competitors are OneWeb and the Amazon satellite company Kaiper as they both also aim to provide global, reliable internet access. Nevertheless, OneWeb is only targeted towards businesses and Kaiper





hasn't launched yet. Despite that, Amazon is trying to prevent Starlink from becoming a monopoly with Jeff Bezos attempting to block proposals for the next-generation Starlink system as a "delay tactic". With competitors like Kaiper, it is unlikely that Starlink will truly hold a monopoly on technology.

Overall, do the ends justify the means? Elon Musk's initiative has resulted in many positive impacts, such as in Ukraine, by striving to provide reliable global internet access. But is it truly an act of kindness if Musk's ultimate goal is money? How can something be an act of kindness if he is being paid for it? The Starlink initiative is ultimately an attempted monopoly on technology and an attempt to obtain power while tackling digital inequality. The initiative aims to solve a problem but only on a profitable basis as opposed to representing a genuine act of kindness.

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