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In-class Quiz #2

Define Digital Rights Management (DRM) and give an example.

DRM is access control technologies that are used to limit the usage of digital content in order to prevent piracy. Examples would include Sony's RootKit incident on music CD's or disabling print buttons in copyrighted PDF files.

Using either Social Contract Theory or Kantianism, discuss the ethics of this DRM.

* Note: There are many correct answers, and just following a proper logical argument would get you full marks. Also SCT is one of the most difficult ethical theories, and many who attempted this has a hard time with it. *

Kantianism Example:

The second formulation of Kantianism states: *"Act so that you always treat others as an end, and never as a means to an end only"* (Quinn). DRM content provides many restrictions to end-users, and violates their right to fair use of the content. Therefore, DRM treats users as an ends to a mean, and thus is unethical in the Kantianism perceptive.

Social Contract Theory:

SCT states: *"morality consists in the set of rules, governing how people are to treat one another, that rational people will agree to accept, for their mutual benefit, on the condition that others follow those rules as well"* (Quinn). Basically, people will accept certain limitations of rights or burdens for the greater good of society, assuming all rational people will follow these rules. DRM benefits the creators by protecting their digital content. However since DRM is not complete, it also poses many restrictions to general society members, much greater than what rational people would find acceptable. Thus SCT would find DRM unethical.

Note, that one could also argue that with a large enough penalties for violating DRM content, all rational people would follow the rules, and may see protecting IP content as necessary for the betterment of society. Thus the DRM burden will become acceptable and SCT would find DRM ethical.

What is MP3 spoofing?

MP3 spoofing is the process of altering, renaming or distorting MP3 files, then distributing them online to discourage online piracy of music.