Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. Three mechanisms: (1) Novelty-plausibility sweet spot — deer in a wildfire road is striking but entirely plausible as a real wildlife photograph; (2) Emotional resonance — the image is designed to produce deep emotional distress about climate and wildlife, suppressing critical evaluation; (3) Context collapse — the artist's clear AI label was stripped when screenshotted and the image circulated without its original framing. The combination of all three was nearly optimal for viral spread.

2. Intent matters morally but not practically for analyzing harm. The image caused real confusion, consumed real fact-checker resources, and contributed to a generalized erosion of trust in wildfire photography. The creator's artistic purpose did not prevent those harms from occurring. From a media literacy standpoint, the outcome — millions believing a false image was real — is what requires analysis, regardless of what anyone intended when creating it.

Multiple Choice

1. B
2. D
3. C

Matching

1-D, 2-C, 3-A, 4-E, 5-B

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) algorithmic, 2) collapse, 3) prebunking

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: Strong emotional responses partially downregulate the prefrontal cortex — the brain's center for deliberative reasoning. In a social media environment where emotionally engaging content is algorithmically amplified, this creates a feedback loop: the content most likely to reach us is also the content most likely to impair our ability to evaluate it carefully before sharing it further.

Q2: Two structural disadvantages: (1) Timing — by the time a fact-check is written, the original false claim has already reached millions; the correction is always catching up to content that has a head start. (2) Emotional disadvantage — fact-checks are inherently less emotionally engaging than the sensational content they're

correcting, so they spread to far fewer people organically. Together these mean corrections rarely reach the same audience that received the original false content.

Q3: Various parties benefited inadvertently from the wildfire image's spread, including: platforms that gained engagement and ad revenue from the emotional interaction; politically motivated actors who wanted to heighten climate anxiety or distrust of news media (depending on their framing); and the general ecosystem of AI art promotion, which got visibility. No single intentional beneficiary needed to exist — the architecture of attention and engagement rewarded the spread regardless of anyone's conscious goal.