

**Dumb is the New Smart:  
Stereotypes in State Farm's "State of Disbelief" Commercial**

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## **Dumb is the New Smart:**

### **Stereotypes in State Farm's "State of Disbelief" Commercial**

They introduce the latest car, the newest gadget, and the most convenient service. Most people see hundreds of them day after day and millions of dollars are spent producing them. It's known as the dreaded commercial. Usually, viewers see commercials as minor annoyances, which interrupt their favorite TV shows. In "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," Kilbourne (2006) points out that, "Most people feel that advertising is not something to take seriously" (Tuned in section). Most viewers don't realize or acknowledge that these "annoyances" actually do more than just annoy, but also reinforce society's stereotypes. Humor, sex, and fantasy are commonly used in advertisements to mask underlying fallacies that are implied. State Farm Insurance (2012) uses humor in the commercial "State Farm® State of Disbelief French Model" to reinforce several stereotypes that exist in society: blonde women are dumb and gullible, men are emotionless, and men believe they are superior to women.

State Farm's (2012) commercial begins with a man standing in front of his car using his smartphone. Then, a woman enters the scene and says, "oh hey. . .what are you up to?" The man says "Ooh just diagraming this accident with my State Farm pocket agent app." The woman responds, "I thought State Farm didn't have all those apps." Then, the man asks, "Where'd you hear that." The woman replies, "On the internet." The man says, "And you believed it?" The woman says, "Yea, they can't put anything on the internet that isn't true." Then, he replies, "Where'd you hear that?" Both say, "On the internet," together. The last scenes of the commercial are of the woman getting picked up by a man she met on the internet. She believes that the second man is a French model because that's what he falsely told the woman over the internet. A onetime viewing of this commercial and the viewer is left with a humorous and

innocent impression. Lopez (2004), in his article “Advertising Analysis,” notes that, “Humor is often used because it makes us feel good and is more memorable” (Common Attention-Getting Hooks section). While the humor in this ad does make it memorable, this commercial must be viewed thoughtfully and without bias to see its underlying stereotypes.

When first analyzing this commercial, we see that it reinforces the stereotype that blonde women are dumb and gullible by using a blonde woman in their commercial and having her believe everything she hears on the internet. Blondes are often ridiculed for being easily fool or impressed. Society has carried the stereotype that blonde women are “airheads” or “not all there.” In the commercial, the blonde woman believes the second man that enters the scene is a French model because he told her over the internet that he was. She never once questions the validity of the “French model’s” statement. She believes that the man is a French model even when the “French model” meets the woman in person, and she can obviously see that the man is neither French nor a model (State Farm Insurance, 2012). Humor is used to reinforce this stereotype in the viewer’s subconscious; this happens even if the viewer doesn’t realize right away that the woman is in fact a blonde. State Farm purposely used a blonde woman in their commercial to play into this stereotype that’s well embedded in society.

Upon further analysis of this commercial, it’s obvious that State Farm is trying to reinforce another stereotype that is typical in society: men have no emotions toward each other or the opposite sex. The first clue for the viewer is when the woman is telling the first man that she believes everything she hears. He has no response to her irrational statement except to simply be dismissive of her and to continue about his business. He shows no desire to politely educate the woman about her misdirected beliefs. The second bit of evidence comes when the second man, or “French model,” enters the scene. The “French model” shows no regret or forgiveness

about lying to the woman. In addition, the first man shows no interest in intervening in the “French model’s” lie and is fine with allowing the woman to be lied to by another man (State Farm Insurance, 2012). This commercial by State Farm uses body language and inaction to imply that men are emotionless.

Finally, through thoughtful analysis we are able to discover this commercial’s deepest rooted societal stereotype: that men feel superior to women. The male superiority stereotype encompasses the commercial as whole. There are glimpse of the stereotype throughout the commercial. The first hint of this stereotype is in the first man’s dismissiveness of the woman as though he expected her gullible nature because she is a woman. Then, the viewer sees that the “French model” has an unwavering confidence that his lie will be accepted without question because he is lying to a woman. When his lie, is in fact, accepted without question then the commercial further plays into the superiority stereotype. Last, State Farm uses two men and one woman in this commercial to also show, subtly, that men feel to be above women. Through much analysis, a viewer can discover this commercial’s hidden overall message and stereotype, which is that men feel they are superior to women.

The commercial concludes with “Unbelievably Mobile” in white letters on a red background (State Farm Insurance, 2012). Humor is a tool that State Farm uses in its commercials very tactically. In particular, they use humor to hide stereotypes in their commercials like in “State Farm® State of Disbelief French Model” It’s not unbelievable that using a State Farm application can make life easier. It’s unbelievable that the average person will never realize that commercials like the one by State Farm are reinforcing many of society’s stereotypes, day after day. Kilbourne (2006) writes, “Some argue that advertising simply reflects societal values rather than affecting them” (Unnatural Passions section). It may not be clear

whether advertisers are influencing society or the other way around, but what can be said is that viewers aren't "unbelievably mobile," but unbelievably oblivious.

## References

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