



Spider-Man Representation in Tom Holland's Trilogy Movie Posters: A Semiotic Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-07-30 Revised: 2026-10-08 Accepted: 2026-10-31</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Movie Poster;</i> <i>Spider-Man;</i> <i>Semiotic Analysis;</i> <i>Verbal Signs;</i> <i>Visual Signs.</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.12090</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Chaden Nirvanda Hana Ludji nirvandaludji@gmail.com Department of English Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Universitas of Mahasaraswati Denpasar</p>	<p><i>Movie posters function not only as promotional media but also as visual texts that communicate meanings through verbal and visual signs. Previous studies have mainly focused on individual movie posters, leaving limited discussion of how Spider-Man's identity develops across the official posters of Tom Holland's trilogy. This study aims to analyze how verbal and visual signs construct the representation of Spider-Man in the official movie posters of Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017), Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019), and Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021). The study employs a qualitative descriptive method using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, focusing on denotation and connotation. Three official posters were selected through purposive sampling because they represent the complete trilogy, allowing Spider-Man's development to be examined across the three films. The analysis examines textual and visual elements, including movie titles, characters, colors, composition, costumes, facial expressions, and backgrounds. The findings reveal that these elements construct Spider-Man's evolving identity throughout the trilogy. Homecoming represents Spider-Man as a young hero balancing teenage life and superhero responsibilities. Far From Home portrays his transition toward greater independence and broader responsibilities, while No Way Home depicts a more mature superhero facing complex conflicts, personal sacrifice, and greater challenges. The study concludes that movie posters function as semiotic texts that reflect the development of Spider-Man's identity through visual and verbal representations across an entire trilogy.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Linguistic elements such as titles, taglines, slogans, and production information, whereas non-verbal signs consist of visual elements, including characters, colors, facial expressions, costumes, typography, composition, lighting, and background. The interaction between these elements enables audiences to construct meanings and develop expectations about a film before watching it. Therefore, movie posters can be regarded as visual texts that convey meanings and construct representations through various signs.

To interpret these meanings, semiotics provides an appropriate analytical approach for examining how signs produce meaning. In *Image–Music–Text*, Barthes (1977) explains that meaning operates on two levels: denotation, which refers to the literal meaning of a sign, and connotation, which refers to the cultural, emotional, or ideological meanings associated with that sign. Through this perspective, semiotic analysis reveals how verbal and non-verbal signs interact to communicate messages beyond their literal appearance. Consequently, Barthes' theory has been widely applied in the analysis of advertisements, films, and movie posters because it uncovers both explicit and implicit meanings represented in visual communication.

In addition, Dyer (1982) argues that advertisements communicate meanings through visual elements such as appearance, pose, facial expression, clothing, setting, objects, and composition. Since movie posters function as a form of advertisement, these visual elements play an important role in conveying messages and attracting audience attention. Therefore, Dyer's perspective complements Barthes' semiotic theory by providing a framework for identifying visual elements before interpreting their denotative and connotative meanings.

Among various film franchises, Spider-Man has become one of the most recognizable superheroes in contemporary popular culture. The official posters of Spider-Man: *Homecoming* (2017), Spider-Man: *Far From Home* (2019), and Spider-Man: *No Way Home* (2021) demonstrate variations in verbal and non-verbal signs throughout Tom Holland's Spider-Man trilogy. Although all three posters represent the same superhero portrayed by Tom Holland, each poster presents different visual compositions, color schemes, character arrangements, typography, taglines, and supporting elements.

These differences indicate that movie posters do not merely function as promotional media but also construct different representations of Spider-Man's identity and development throughout the trilogy. From a cultural and media studies perspective, Spider-Man is a relevant research object because of his prominent position in contemporary popular culture, while examining the same character across a trilogy provides an opportunity to understand changes in his representation alongside his narrative development. The visual elements in these posters reflect changes in Peter Parker's journey, from a young student discovering his superhero identity, to a hero experiencing personal growth, and finally to a superhero facing larger and more complex challenges. Therefore, these posters provide rich material for semiotic analysis to examine how verbal and non-verbal signs contribute to the construction of Spider-Man's representation.

Several previous studies have investigated meanings represented in movie posters and other visual media. Septiani and Tawami (2024) analyzed the denotative and connotative meanings in the official poster of Spider-Man: *Across the Spider-Verse* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Dewi and Khristianto (2022) examined the relationship

between visual and verbal elements in Spider-Man: No Way Home through a multimodal approach. Furthermore, Dewi and Pratiwi (2024) explored the meanings represented in Indonesian horror movie posters through semiotic analysis. Pratiwi et al. (2024) investigated the hidden meanings represented through verbal and visual signs in drug posters through semiotic analysis.

In addition, Durmuş (2024) analyzed the verbal and non-verbal signs in the Black Panther movie poster using Barthes' semiotic theory. Recent international studies have also examined movie posters through multimodal and semiotic approaches. Wang, Wang, and Xue (2023) analyzed 60 movie posters from Chinese, German, and Indian film contexts, while Boysan and Kızıltan (2023) examined three film posters through a semiotic landscape approach. These studies demonstrate that visual and verbal resources work together to construct meaning in movie posters.

Although these previous studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of semiotic meanings in posters, several limitations remain. Most studies focus on a single poster, different film genres, or different analytical approaches. While previous studies have examined individual poster meanings and comparisons across different films or cultural contexts, limited studies have specifically examined how verbal and non-verbal signs construct the representation of the same superhero and reflect the development of the character across a complete film trilogy.

Therefore, this study fills this gap by analyzing the official posters of Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017), Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019), and Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) using Barthes' semiotic theory. This study aims to reveal how verbal and non-verbal signs construct meanings and represent the development of Spider-Man's identity throughout Tom Holland's trilogy. Theoretically, this study contributes to the application of Barthes' semiotic theory to character representation across multiple posters within the same film franchise, while practically, it provides insights for students and researchers in semiotics, media studies, and visual communication.

2. Method

The data in this study were obtained from the IMP Awards website, which provides a collection of official movie posters from various films. The website was selected as the data source because it provides movie poster archives that can be used as visual materials for semiotic analysis. The data used in this study consist of three official Spider-Man movie posters from Tom Holland's Spider-Man trilogy, namely Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017), Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019), and Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021).

The three posters were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. The posters were selected because they represent the complete trilogy of Tom Holland's portrayal of Spider-Man and show the same main character across three films. This selection allows the researcher to examine changes in Spider-Man's representation throughout the trilogy. Furthermore, the selected posters contain relevant verbal and non-verbal signs, including color schemes, character positioning, typography, composition, background elements, movie titles, taglines, and other textual information.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method because the research focuses on describing, interpreting, and explaining the meanings represented through verbal and non-verbal signs in Spider-Man movie posters. The data collection was conducted using the observation method and note-taking technique. Each selected poster was carefully

observed to identify and classify the verbal and non-verbal signs presented. The verbal signs include movie titles, taglines, and other written information, while the non-verbal signs include characters, colors, costumes, facial expressions, typography, composition, and background elements.

The data analysis was conducted using Barthes' (1977) semiotic theory, particularly the concepts of denotation and connotation. First, the researcher identified the verbal and non-verbal signs in each poster. Second, the visual elements were classified based on Dyer's (1982) perspective on advertising. Third, the identified signs were analyzed at the denotative level to describe their literal meanings. Fourth, the signs were analyzed at the connotative level to interpret deeper meanings related to identity, emotions, cultural values, and representation. Finally, the findings from the three posters were compared to identify similarities and differences in the representation of Spider-Man throughout the trilogy.

To minimize researcher subjectivity, the interpretation was based on observable signs in the posters and supported by Barthes' (1977) and Dyer's (1982) theoretical perspectives. The trustworthiness of the study was maintained through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability by applying the same observation and analysis procedures to all three posters, providing clear descriptions of the data and analytical process, and basing the interpretations on the selected theoretical framework.

Regarding ethical considerations, this study uses publicly available movie posters for academic purposes. The visual materials are properly acknowledged through the IMP Awards website as the data source.

3. Result

The findings of this study show that the three official movie posters of Tom Holland's Spider-Man trilogy construct different representations of Spider-Man through the interaction of verbal and visual signs. Although the three posters contain recurring elements, such as the Spider-Man character, movie title, Marvel Studios branding, and promotional information, their visual compositions and contextual elements create different representations of Peter Parker. The Spider-Man: Homecoming poster emphasizes Peter's youth and connection with school life, Spider-Man: Far From Home emphasizes exploration, transition, and increasing responsibility, while Spider-Man: No Way Home presents a more complex representation involving conflict, consequences, and maturity.

The comparison also shows a gradual expansion of Peter Parker's world throughout the trilogy. In Homecoming, Spider-Man is placed within an urban environment and is visually associated with school-related elements. In Far From Home, he is presented in an international setting through London landmarks, indicating movement beyond his familiar environment. In No Way Home, the appearance of Doctor Strange, the golden portal, mechanical tentacles, and the destroyed city creates a more complex and threatening environment. These changes indicate that the posters visually reflect the development of Spider-Man from a young hero learning to balance two identities into a more mature hero facing greater responsibilities and consequences.

3.1 Analysis of "Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)" Movie Poster



Figure 1. "Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)" Movie Poster

3.1.1 The Analysis of Verbal Signs

The primary verbal sign in the Spider-Man: Homecoming poster is the word "Homecoming." At the denotative level, "Homecoming" refers to returning home or a school-related celebration. In the context of the film, however, the word carries meanings beyond its literal definition.

At the connotative level, "Homecoming" is associated with belonging, identity, new beginnings, and the early development of Peter Parker as Spider-Man. The title is closely related to the narrative context of the film, in which Peter is portrayed as a high-school student who attempts to balance his ordinary teenage life with his responsibilities as a superhero. Therefore, the verbal sign constructs Spider-Man as a young and developing hero rather than a fully established superhero.

The meaning of "Homecoming" also becomes more significant when compared with the titles of the following films. While "Homecoming" suggests familiarity and belonging, "Far From Home" suggests distance and transition, and "No Way Home" suggests the absence of a simple return to normality. Thus, the verbal signs contribute to the broader development of Peter Parker's identity throughout the trilogy.

3.1.2 The Analysis of Visual Signs

The visual composition of the Homecoming poster strongly connects Spider-Man with teenage and everyday life. One of the most significant visual combinations is Spider-Man wearing his superhero costume while carrying a school backpack. Denotatively, these elements present the character as both a superhero and a student. Connotatively, the combination creates a contrast between Peter Parker's ordinary teenage identity and his role as Spider-Man.

Spider-Man's relaxed posture and direct gaze reinforce this youthful representation. Instead of being presented in an aggressive action pose, he appears approachable and casual. This makes his superhero identity more relatable and emphasizes that he is still developing his confidence and understanding of responsibility.

The position of Spider-Man between two tall buildings also contributes to the representation of his identity. Denotatively, the buildings establish the urban environment in which Spider-Man operates. Connotatively, his position between the buildings can represent the space between Peter's ordinary life and his superhero identity. The narrow space surrounding him further suggests the limitations and pressure involved in balancing these two roles.

The bright blue sky and urban environment create a relatively light atmosphere. In contrast to imagery dominated by destruction or darkness, the bright setting supports the representation of Spider-Man as a young hero at the beginning of his journey. Therefore, the backpack, relaxed posture, urban setting, and bright atmosphere collectively construct Spider-Man as a youthful and relatable superhero who is still learning how to balance his identities.

3.2 Analysis of "Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019)" Movie Poster



Figure 2. Spider-Man: Far From Home Movie Poster

3.2.1 The Analysis of Verbal Signs

The primary verbal sign in the Spider-Man: Far From Home poster is the phrase "Far From Home." At the denotative level, the phrase refers to being physically distant from one's home or familiar environment. This meaning is reflected in the film's international setting.

At the connotative level, "Far From Home" represents Peter Parker's personal development as he encounters unfamiliar environments and greater responsibilities. The phrase suggests a movement beyond the familiar situation presented in Homecoming. Peter is no longer represented only through his school life and neighborhood environment but as a hero whose experiences extend beyond his usual surroundings.

Compared with “Homecoming,” the phrase “Far From Home” therefore indicates a transition in Peter’s identity. The verbal sign contributes to the representation of Spider-Man as a developing hero who is learning to adapt to broader responsibilities.

3.2.2 The Analysis of Visual Signs

The visual signs in the Far From Home poster shift Spider-Man’s representation toward a broader international environment. Spider-Man is positioned on the London Eye, while Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament appear in the background. Denotatively, these landmarks establish London as the setting. Connotatively, they represent Peter’s movement beyond the familiar environment associated with his earlier experiences.

Spider-Man’s elevated position on the London Eye also contributes to this interpretation. His position provides a broad view of the city and visually expands the scale of his environment. Compared with the Homecoming poster, where the character is closely connected to school and urban surroundings, the Far From Home poster presents Spider-Man within a wider world.

The contrast between Spider-Man’s superhero costume and the travel environment further emphasizes his dual identity. Although Peter is physically far from his familiar environment, his responsibilities as Spider-Man remain with him. This suggests that his superhero identity is no longer limited to a particular neighborhood.

The diagonal perspective and Spider-Man’s gaze toward the surrounding environment create a sense of movement and uncertainty. These elements support the idea of transition and adaptation as Peter encounters unfamiliar experiences. Therefore, the London landmarks, elevated position, travel environment, and dynamic composition collectively construct Spider-Man as a hero experiencing personal growth and increasing responsibility.

3.3 Analysis of “Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021)” Movie Poster



Figure 3. Spider-Man: No Way Home Movie Poster

3.3.1 The Analysis of Verbal Signs

The primary verbal sign in the Spider-Man: No Way Home poster is the title “No Way Home.” At the denotative level, the phrase suggests that there is no available way to return home or to a familiar condition. Compared with the previous titles, the expression creates a progression from “Homecoming” to “Far From Home” and finally to “No Way Home.”

At the connotative level, “No Way Home” suggests uncertainty, loss, and consequences. The idea of having “no way home” reflects a situation in which Peter can no longer simply return to his previous life. In the context of the film’s narrative, his actions lead to increasingly complex consequences involving other characters and realities.

Therefore, the verbal sign contributes to the representation of Spider-Man as a more mature character who must deal with consequences rather than simply learning how to become a superhero. The progression of the three titles strengthens the representation of Peter’s development from belonging, to distance, and finally to a situation in which returning to normality becomes increasingly difficult.

3.3.2 The Analysis of Visual Signs

The Spider-Man: No Way Home poster presents the most complex visual construction among the three posters. Unlike the youthful atmosphere of Homecoming and the travel-oriented environment of Far From Home, this poster contains Doctor Strange, a golden portal, mechanical tentacles, and a destroyed urban environment. Together, these elements create an atmosphere of danger, uncertainty, and conflict.

The presence of Doctor Strange connects Spider-Man’s story with the magical side of the Marvel universe. Denotatively, Doctor Strange appears behind Spider-Man as another important character. Connotatively, his presence suggests that Peter’s conflict has expanded beyond his individual superhero experience. Similarly, the golden portal represents a connection between different spaces or realities and reinforces the wider scope of the narrative.

Spider-Man’s central position among the surrounding elements is also significant. Although multiple powerful forces surround him, he remains the visual focus of the poster. This composition suggests that Peter is at the center of the conflict and must face its consequences. Compared with the relaxed representation in Homecoming, Spider-Man is now visually surrounded by threats and instability.

The mechanical tentacles associated with Doctor Octopus reinforce the idea of returning conflicts and threats from Spider-Man’s past. Their position around Spider-Man creates a sense of pressure and danger. The destroyed city background further strengthens the representation of conflict and disorder.

The contrast between Spider-Man’s recognizable costume and the chaotic environment also emphasizes the continuity of his identity. Even when the environment becomes increasingly unstable, the costume remains a visual marker of his responsibility as Spider-Man. Therefore, the combination of Doctor Strange, the golden portal, mechanical tentacles, Spider-Man’s central position, and the destroyed environment constructs Spider-Man as a more mature hero facing complex conflicts and consequences.

Table 1. Comparison of Spider-Man Representation Across Tom Holland's Trilogy

Aspect	Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)	Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019)	Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021)
Verbal signs	The title "Homecoming" represents belonging, new beginnings, identity, and Peter Parker's early development as a young superhero.	The title "Far From Home" represents a journey beyond familiar surroundings, personal growth, adaptation, and increasing responsibility.	The title represents a more complex stage of Spider-Man's journey, involving greater challenges, responsibility, and personal consequences.
Main visual focus	School-related elements, Spider-Man's costume, urban surroundings, and relaxed posture emphasize the contrast between Peter Parker's teenage life and his superhero identity.	The London Eye, London landmarks, travel atmosphere, Spider-Man's position, and diagonal composition emphasize transition, exploration, and broader responsibilities.	Doctor Strange, the golden portal, Spider-Man's position, mechanical tentacles, and the destroyed urban background emphasize larger conflicts, multiple realities, and greater responsibility.
Representation of Spider-Man	A young and inexperienced hero who is learning to balance his ordinary teenage life with his responsibilities as Spider-Man.	A developing hero who is becoming more independent while adapting to unfamiliar environments and broader responsibilities.	A more mature hero who faces complex conflicts, personal sacrifice, and consequences that extend beyond his individual world.
Overall development	Identity formation and the beginning of Spider-Man's development.	Transition, personal growth, and increasing responsibility.	Maturity, complex conflict, and acceptance of greater responsibility.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the representation of Spider-Man develops throughout Tom Holland's trilogy through the interaction of verbal and visual signs. The findings are related to previous studies that have examined semiotic meanings in movie posters and visual media. Septiani and Tawami (2024) analyzed the Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse poster using Barthes' semiotic theory and found that denotative and connotative meanings contribute to the representation of the film.

Similarly, Dewi and Khristianto (2022) examined Spider-Man: No Way Home through a multimodal approach and found that verbal and visual elements work together to construct meaning. The present study extends these findings by examining the representation of the same superhero across three films in a trilogy. Rather than focusing on one poster, this study shows how the representation of Spider-Man changes across different stages of the character's narrative development.

The development of Spider-Man's representation can also be understood from a broader cultural and ideological perspective. In *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, Peter Parker is represented as a young superhero who is closely connected to school life and teenage identity. This representation reflects the tension between ordinary youth and extraordinary responsibility. In *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, Peter is presented in a wider environment outside his familiar surroundings, which represents a transition toward greater independence and responsibility. In *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, the representation becomes more complex through the presence of Doctor Strange, supernatural elements, and destructive environments. These elements reflect the increasing complexity of Peter's challenges and the consequences of his actions. Therefore, the development across the trilogy represents a movement from youth and identity formation toward maturity, responsibility, and personal sacrifice.

The findings also show that Marvel Studios' branding strategy influences the visual representation of Spider-Man. The three posters maintain recognizable elements associated with Spider-Man while presenting different visual compositions according to the narrative of each film. The continued presence of Spider-Man maintains character recognition and brand continuity across the trilogy. At the same time, changes in settings, supporting characters, composition, and other visual elements distinguish each film and communicate its specific narrative context. This combination of consistency and variation allows the posters to maintain a recognizable franchise identity while presenting the development of Spider-Man across the trilogy.

Theoretically, this study contributes to semiotic and visual communication studies by demonstrating that Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation can be applied comparatively across multiple promotional texts. The analysis shows that signs do not operate independently but gain meaning through their relationship with other verbal and visual elements and through the narrative context of each film. Therefore, the contribution of this study goes beyond identifying denotative and connotative meanings in individual posters. It demonstrates how semiotic analysis can be used to examine the development of a character's representation across a complete film trilogy.

The findings also support the previous studies discussed in the introduction. Wang, Wang, and Xue (2023) examined movie posters from different cultural contexts and demonstrated how multiple semiotic resources contribute to meaning-making, while Boysan and Kızıltan (2023) examined film posters through a semiotic landscape approach. These studies show the importance of examining the relationship between visual and verbal resources in movie posters. The present study extends this perspective by focusing on the same superhero across three films and examining how the combination of these signs changes alongside the character's development.

4.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to three official movie posters, with one poster representing each film in Tom Holland's Spider-Man trilogy. Therefore, the findings cannot represent all promotional materials related to the three films. Other posters, trailers, advertisements, and promotional materials may construct different representations of Spider-Man. Second, this study focuses on Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly denotation and connotation. Other theoretical approaches may provide additional perspectives on the posters, especially in relation to multimodal

communication, discourse, visual culture, or audience reception. Finally, the qualitative interpretation involves the researcher's analytical perspective, although the interpretation is based on observable verbal and visual signs and supported by the selected theoretical framework.

4.2 Future Research

Future research can examine a larger range of promotional materials, including multiple posters, trailers, advertisements, and other forms of promotional media. Researchers may also apply multimodal discourse analysis to examine more extensively how verbal and visual resources interact in constructing meaning. In addition, comparative studies involving other superhero franchises could provide broader perspectives on how superhero identities are constructed through promotional media. Future research may also examine audience reception to understand how viewers interpret the verbal and visual representations identified in movie posters.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the verbal and non-verbal signs in the official movie posters of Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017), Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019), and Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The findings show that the verbal and non-verbal signs in each poster communicate meanings at both the denotative and connotative levels. While the verbal signs provide information about the films, the visual signs convey deeper meanings related to Spider-Man's identity, responsibilities, personal growth, and the narrative of each film. The interaction between these signs demonstrates that movie posters function not only as promotional media but also as visual texts that communicate symbolic meanings.

The analysis reveals that the representation of Spider-Man develops throughout Tom Holland's trilogy. In Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017), Spider-Man is represented as a young superhero who is still balancing his ordinary teenage life with his responsibilities as a hero. In Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019), he is portrayed as a character who experiences personal growth while adapting to greater responsibilities beyond his familiar environment. Meanwhile, Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) represents Spider-Man as a more mature hero who faces complex conflicts, personal sacrifice, and challenges that extend beyond his individual world. These representations are constructed through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal signs, which communicate meanings beyond their literal appearance.

Although each poster presents different visual compositions and narrative emphases, the three posters share several recurring verbal elements, such as the Marvel Studios logo, cinema format labels (e.g., IMAX and other premium screening formats), the movie title, and release information. These recurring elements establish a consistent promotional identity across the trilogy, while the differences in visual composition, character arrangement, color, facial expressions, background, and supporting characters distinguish the representation of Spider-Man in each film according to its respective storyline.

Overall, this study demonstrates that movie posters are not merely promotional materials but also semiotic texts that construct the representation of Spider-Man through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal signs. By applying Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, this study reveals how visual and textual elements work together to represent Spider-Man's evolving identity across Tom Holland's trilogy. It is

expected that this study will contribute to the field of semiotic studies, particularly in the analysis of movie posters, and serve as a reference for future research on visual communication and representation in other forms of media.

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