



Verbal and Visual Signs on “How I Met Your Mother” TV Series Poster

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Abstract: *This research, entitled Verbal and Visual Signs on “How I Met Your Mother” TV Series Poster, focuses on identifying both verbal and visual signs that appear on the official poster of the series and analyzing the meanings they convey. The study applies a qualitative-descriptive method with a semiotic approach, mainly grounded in Chandler’s (2007) theory of semiotics. This is further supported by Dyer’s (1982) theory of verbal and nonverbal signs, as well as Olesen’s (2019) color theory, which enrich the interpretation of the visual elements. The data for this research were collected from official How I Met Your Mother TV Series posters accessed through online sources. The analysis highlights how verbal signs, such as the series title and additional text, function as direct communicators, providing the audience with essential information about the show. At the same time, visual signs play a central role in shaping the poster’s meaning. The representation of the main characters, the recurring image of the iconic yellow umbrella, and the deliberate use of colors in both costumes and background create symbolic layers that reflect the characters’ personalities, relationships, and the overall tone of the narrative. This research demonstrates that a poster is not only a promotional tool but also a semiotic artifact that embodies the essence of the series. Through the interplay of verbal and visual elements, the How I Met Your Mother poster encapsulates the themes of love, friendship, and destiny, which lie at the heart of the storyline and continue to resonate with its audience.*

Keywords: Code; Color; Poster; Series; Sign.

1. INTRODUCTION

Semiotics, as defined by Chandler (2007), is the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior. In visual media such as posters, both verbal and visual signs play essential roles in conveying messages, establishing identities, and engaging audiences. Posters are often the first point of contact between a show and its potential viewers. Therefore, their design is loaded with purposeful signs that help communicate the core themes, tone, and narrative cues of the show they represent.

In the context of visual storytelling, posters serve as a bridge between the creators and their intended audience. They are not merely decorative visuals, but function as curated texts that encapsulate narrative essence and character dynamics through deliberate symbolic choices. These choices, ranging from colors and composition to typography and character positioning, are all part of a larger semiotic system that guides audience interpretation. For instance, the inclusion of specific objects like the yellow umbrella in the *How I Met Your Mother* (HIMYM) poster is not accidental, but strategically chosen to hint at central themes such as destiny and

love. Analyzing these elements semiotically reveals the deeper communicative intent behind the surface image.

Moreover, semiotic analysis of television posters allows scholars to unpack the layers of cultural meaning embedded in media texts. As Barthes (1967) argues, images operate through both denotation and connotation, which means that signs do not just communicate straightforward information, they also carry cultural myths and ideologies. HIMYM, while presented as a light-hearted sitcom, deals with themes such as romantic longing, friendship, loss, and personal growth. The poster's visual and verbal signs help frame the viewer's expectations about these themes. Thus, applying semiotic theory to the HIMYM poster not only uncovers narrative clues but also offers insight into the cultural values the series communicates.

This research is especially relevant in today's digital and visual culture, where posters continue to play a crucial role in the promotion and identity of media products. In an age where viewers often make viewing decisions based on a single poster or thumbnail, understanding how meaning is constructed visually becomes increasingly important. Through this study, the HIMYM poster is treated as a semiotic artifact that speaks volumes about the show's tone, character arcs, and thematic depth. By critically examining the interplay between verbal and visual signs in this promotional material, the study not only enhances our understanding of HIMYM as a cultural product but also contributes to the broader field of media semiotics.

The How I Met Your Mother (HIMYM) poster is a compelling case for semiotic analysis due to its symbolic richness. It prominently features iconic visual elements such as the yellow umbrella and the carefully posed main characters, along with verbal cues like the show's title and air date. Through a semiotic lens, this research investigates how these signs contribute to the audience's understanding and expectations of the show.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis in this study draws on three main theoretical frameworks. First, Saussure's semiotics, as explained by Chandler (2007), emphasizes the distinction between the signifier (form) and the signified (concept), which provides a foundation for examining both textual and visual signs in the poster. Second, Dyer's (1982) theory of verbal and nonverbal signs offers insights into how text and imagery interact to construct meaning within media communication. Finally, Olesen's (2019) color theory highlights the role of color as a communicative element that conveys emotions, creates atmosphere, and symbolizes deeper thematic values. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive semiotic analysis of the poster, combining textual,

visual, and chromatic dimensions to reveal how meaning is constructed and communicated to the audience.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive method and adopted a semiotic approach to analyze visual and verbal signs found in the *How I Met Your Mother* poster. The research applied the following components: 1) Data Source : The data were collected from an official promotional poster of *How I Met Your Mother* accessed via the Disney+ asset repository. The poster was selected because of its rich combination of visual and verbal elements that reflect the themes and character identities in the TV series. 2) Method and Technique of Collecting Data : The documentation method was used to collect data, supported by a note-taking technique. According to Sugiyono (2017), documentation involves collecting data through written sources such as texts and images. The poster was downloaded and then examined for both textual and visual signs. The note-taking technique was applied to identify and categorize each element systematically. 3) Method and Technique of Analyzing Data : The analysis followed Chandler's (2007) semiotic framework, focusing on the relationship between signifier and signified. Dyer's (1982) theory of verbal and nonverbal signs was applied to interpret textual and visual elements. Additionally, Olesen's (2019) color theory helped uncover the emotional and symbolic meanings conveyed through color schemes. 4) Method and Technique of Presenting the Analysis : The results of the analysis were presented using an informal method as proposed by Sudaryanto (1993), which involves explaining findings descriptively using ordinary language for clarity and accessibility.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the verbal and visual signs identified in the HIMYM posters and explores their semiotic meanings. Three main posters are examined, each containing unique combinations of textual and visual elements that reflect the show's themes and character traits.

The analysis of media texts such as posters requires attention to both visual and verbal communication, as each element contributes to the way meaning is constructed and received. In the case of *How I Met Your Mother* (HIMYM), the poster serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a condensed visual narrative that introduces viewers to the show's central themes, emotional tone, and character dynamics. By employing semiotic theory, particularly the concepts of signifier and signified from Saussure, and connotation and denotation from

Barthes, this discussion aims to unpack the layers of meaning encoded within the promotional posters of the series.

Understanding the HIMYM poster through a semiotic lens allows for a deeper exploration of how seemingly simple images and texts function symbolically. Each sign—whether a phrase, a color, or a character’s placement, acts as part of a larger communicative system. These posters do more than display cast members or announce air dates; they signal emotional cues, hint at narrative developments, and align the audience with particular perspectives. Through this discussion, the verbal and visual elements will be deconstructed to reveal how meaning is constructed and how the audience is guided to interpret the series even before watching a single episode.

Verbal Signs :

The primary verbal sign is the show’s title, “How I Met Your Mother,” which functions as both an informative element and a narrative anchor. Additional verbal signs like “100th episode on Jan 11” and “Only on CBS” serve as promotional markers, providing practical information to the audience.

The font and color used in the title “How I Met Your Mother” also play a significant semiotic role. Written in a clean, sans-serif typeface and often placed prominently in the upper third of the poster, the typography conveys simplicity and modernity, matching the show’s urban setting and contemporary themes. The dark blue or nearly black font color contrasts with the lighter background, making the title not only legible but visually dominant. This typographical design contributes to establishing the show’s identity as a mix of emotional depth and light-hearted humor.

Furthermore, the additional texts, such as “100th episode on Jan 11” and “Only on CBS”—are not merely informative, but function as anchoring devices that place the series within a temporal and institutional context. These elements reinforce the legitimacy and longevity of the show. From a semiotic standpoint, these promotional texts work in tandem with the central title to communicate continuity and success, encouraging both loyal viewers and potential new audiences to engage with the show. The strategic placement and formatting of these verbal signs suggest intentional design to guide viewer perception and recall.

Table 1. The semiotic components of these verbal signs are summarized in the following table.

Verbal Sign	Meaning
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How I Met Your Mother (title)	Functions as the show's narrative anchor and brand identity; central to viewer recognition
Font (clean, sans-serif)	Represents simplicity, clarity, and modernity; reflects the show's contemporary setting
Color of title text (dark blue/black)	Conveys professionalism, depth, and emotional contrast against the light background
Placement of title (upper third of poster)	Emphasizes importance and visibility; draws immediate viewer attention
100th episode on Jan 11	Acts as a temporal anchor; highlights the show's longevity and continuity
Only on CBS	Institutional identifier; promotes network exclusivity and reinforces show legitimacy

Visual Signs

Visual signs in the posters include the yellow umbrella, the characters' attire, and the overall color palette. The yellow umbrella appears consistently and symbolizes hope, fate, and emotional continuity throughout the series. It stands out visually against dark backgrounds or among black umbrellas, reinforcing its narrative significance. The use of color in clothing supports character development: blue for Ted (trust, calm), red for Robin (confidence, strength), gray for Barney (emotional restraint), green for Lily (growth, harmony), and brown for Marshall (stability). These visual cues offer immediate insight into character traits. The blue sky backgrounds used in some posters evoke feelings of calm and storytelling nostalgia.

In addition to clothing color, character posture and positioning contribute significantly to the semiotic meaning of the posters. Ted, often placed at the center and holding the yellow umbrella, is framed as the protagonist and emotional core of the narrative. The centrality of his figure in the composition aligns with the narrative structure of the series, which revolves around his journey. The symmetrical arrangement of the other characters beside him suggests balance and unity, implying that although Ted is the narrator, the ensemble cast plays a crucial role in his story.

Another recurring visual motif is the contrast between the single yellow umbrella and the surrounding black umbrellas. This juxtaposition emphasizes uniqueness and singularity, reflecting the narrative theme of searching for "the one." The black umbrellas serve as a visual metaphor for the many romantic failures or obstacles Ted experiences, while the yellow umbrella stands as a beacon of eventual happiness. Through the lens of Olesen's (2019) color

theory, this consistent contrast between joy (yellow) and seriousness or mystery (black) encapsulates the emotional highs and lows embedded in the show’s romantic and comedic elements.

Table 2. The semiotic components of these visual signs are summarized in the following table.

Visual Sign	Meaning
Yellow umbrella	Symbolizes hope, fate, and emotional continuity; stands out as a unique narrative symbol
Black umbrellas	Represent failed relationships, sadness, and contrast with the yellow umbrella to emphasize uniqueness
Ted’s blue clothing	Conveys trust, calmness, and emotional depth
Robin’s red clothing	Symbolizes confidence, independence, and strength
Barney’s gray clothing	Represents emotional restraint, detachment, and immaturity
Lily’s green clothing	Signifies growth, harmony, and balance
Marshall’s brown clothing	Reflects stability, reliability, and comfort
Blue sky background	Evokes feelings of calm, peace, and nostalgic storytelling
Ted holding the yellow umbrella	Highlights Ted’s central role and emotional core of the story
Central positioning of Ted	Frames him as the protagonist; emphasizes his importance in the narrative
Symmetrical arrangement of characters	Represents group unity and shared significance in Ted’s journey

Catchphrases as Verbal Signs

Catchphrases like “Suit up!”, “Legen—wait for it—dary!”, and “When I’m sad, I stop being sad and be awesome instead” are also verbal signs. They represent character identities, ideologies, and humor. Semiotic analysis reveals that these phrases act as signs carrying deeper cultural meanings—such as masculinity, confidence, and performative identity.

The repetitive use of these catchphrases across seasons builds a form of intertextual dialogue between the show and its audience. For example, the phrase “Legen—wait for it—dary!” not only characterizes Barney Stinson’s flamboyant persona but also involves the viewer

in the pause, creating anticipation. This delay is a rhetorical strategy that mirrors the storytelling structure of the show itself—where the central narrative is always postponed. Through semiotic codes like the hermeneutic and proairetic, the phrase becomes a microcosm of the series' overall style: dramatic buildup followed by comedic or emotional payoff.

Moreover, catchphrases like “Suit up!” and “Lawyered!” transform ordinary language into identity markers. When analyzed through the lens of Barthes' (1970) symbolic code, they function as ideological statements. “Suit up!” encapsulates an aspirational view of adulthood tied to style and confidence, while “Lawyered!” reduces complex arguments into witty finality, aligning with Marshall's legal profession and sense of moral justice. These catchphrases are more than punchlines; they are semiotic signs that reveal the characters' roles within social hierarchies and cultural scripts, resonating with audiences on a level that blends humor, symbolism, and social commentary.

Robin's assertive phrase “I'm Sparkles, bitch!”, spoken through her alter ego Robin Sparkles, adds another layer to the show's use of language. This catchphrase subverts typical pop-star innocence by pairing glittery visuals with assertive, aggressive language. Through the symbolic code, this phrase challenges stereotypes of femininity and suggests Robin's dual identity: one that blends sweetness with defiance. It also reflects intertextual commentary on performative identity in pop culture, reinforcing Robin's complexity as a character.

Ted's narration, “Because sometimes even if you know how something's going to end, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the ride,” acts as a reflective verbal sign tied closely to the show's central theme. It represents romantic idealism, acceptance, and emotional wisdom. Structurally, it mirrors the storytelling format of *How I Met Your Mother*, where the conclusion is known, but the emotional depth is found in the journey itself. This line is a hermeneutic key that unlocks the show's philosophical undertone, inviting audiences to embrace uncertainty with hope.

Ted's long love monologue—“Actually, there is a word for that. It's love...” functions as one of the most emotionally charged verbal signs in the series. Through a combination of repetition, emotional buildup, and symbolic contrast, this speech elevates the idea of love to something sacrificial and enduring. Analyzed through Barthes' denotative and connotative layers, it communicates both romantic passion and a critique of disposable modern relationships. It becomes a manifesto of emotional resilience and narrative closure.

Lily's recurring line, “You son of a bitch!”, often used during intimate or revelatory moments, plays with contrast and expectation. Though aggressive in tone, it frequently precedes moments of emotional warmth or humor. This verbal sign uses the hermeneutic code

to surprise the audience, misdirecting them with harsh language before revealing affection or admiration. It blurs the boundaries between confrontation and connection, portraying the emotional complexity of close relationships in a comedic yet authentic way.

Table 3. The semiotic components of these catchphrases are summarized in the following table.

Catchphrase	Signifier	Signified
Legen—wait for it—dary!	The fragmented and delayed phrase “Legen—wait for it—dary!”	Anticipation, theatricality, dramatization of everyday experiences
Suit up!	The imperative to wear a suit	Masculine power, readiness, constructed image-based identity
Lawyered!	A one-word declaration after a verbal argument	Debate victory, logical dominance, intellectual confidence
When I’m sad, I stop being sad and be awesome instead	A declarative denial of emotional vulnerability	Performative masculinity, emotional repression, exaggerated confidence
I’m Sparkles, bitch!	The contrast between a glittery stage name and aggressive language	Reclaimed identity, ironic nostalgia, subversion of feminine stereotypes
Because sometimes even if you know how something’s going to end...	A reflective, narrative-style philosophical statement	Acceptance of fate, emotional maturity, valuing life’s journey over destination
Actually, there is a word for that. It’s love...	An emotionally intense, extended monologue about the nature of love	Unconditional love, vulnerability, defiance of emotional cynicism
You son of a bitch!	A harsh insult used in intimate, emotional contexts	Affection hidden beneath aggression, emotional surprise, sarcasm as bonding

5. CONCLUSION

The How I Met Your Mother TV series poster operates as a semiotic artifact composed of layered verbal and visual signs. Verbal elements inform and anchor narrative direction, while visual signs, like the umbrella and color schemes, convey emotional and symbolic meaning. Each component contributes to shaping audience perception and expectations before viewing. Moreover, catchphrases embedded in the show act as verbal signs that extend narrative identity beyond the screen.

This analysis also underscores how the strategic use of color, spatial arrangement, and typographic design in the poster is not merely aesthetic but communicative. The recurring

symbol of the yellow umbrella, juxtaposed with darker visual elements, encapsulates the central emotional arc of the series, balancing loss and longing with hope and fulfillment. Similarly, the central placement of Ted among the ensemble cast highlights his role as both narrator and protagonist, reinforcing the framing narrative of the series. These visual decisions reflect careful semiotic planning aimed at conveying the core narrative and emotional dynamics of the show through static imagery.

Furthermore, the integration of iconic catchphrases into the show's dialogue enhances its cultural and semiotic reach. Phrases like "Suit up!" and "Legen—wait for it—dary!" have transcended the fictional world to become markers of identity and ideology, both for the characters and the audience. Through their repetition and association with specific characters, these catchphrases function as linguistic signs that reinforce personality traits, social commentary, and cultural values. In sum, *How I Met Your Mother's* posters and verbal signatures collaboratively construct a multilayered media identity, illustrating how visual and verbal semiotics contribute not only to branding but to deeper thematic storytelling.

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