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(54) Title: TELEVISION CHAT SYSTEM

(57) Abstract

A television chat system is provided that allows television viewers to engage in real–time communications in chat groups with other television viewers while watching television. Users of the television chat system may engage in real–time communications with others users who are currently watching the same television program or channel. The system allows real–time communications in a chat group to be transmitted between users at user television equipment devices via a television distribution facility. The television chat system of the present invention permits users to join chat groups related to television programs, channels, or categories of programs that the user may be interested in. Real–time communications may be textual messages, audio communications, or video communications. The television chat system may also allow users to send chat requests to ask other users to enter a chat group. The system also permits users to establish chat groups that television viewers are permitted to join. The television chat system may be based on an interactive television program guide or set–top box application implemented on a set–top box.

