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(54) **SYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEM AND METHOD**

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H04L 12/58	(2006.01)
G06Q 30/06	(2012.01)
G06Q 50/00	(2012.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H04L 51/32*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 30/0631*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 50/01*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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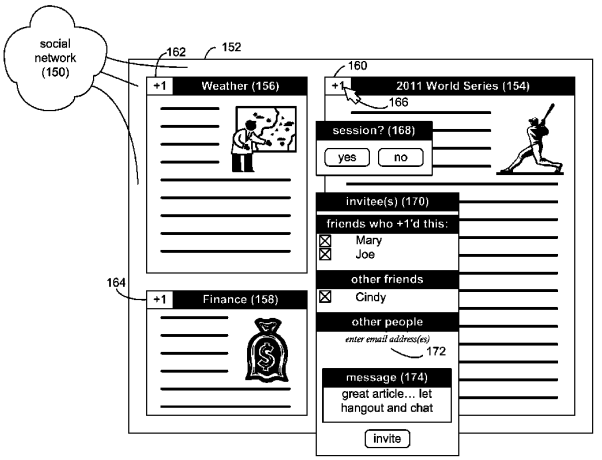
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method, computer program product, and computing system for providing a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object. An indication is received from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object. Electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session are provided to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network. A request is received, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session is provided for the first user and the at least one of the invited users.

27 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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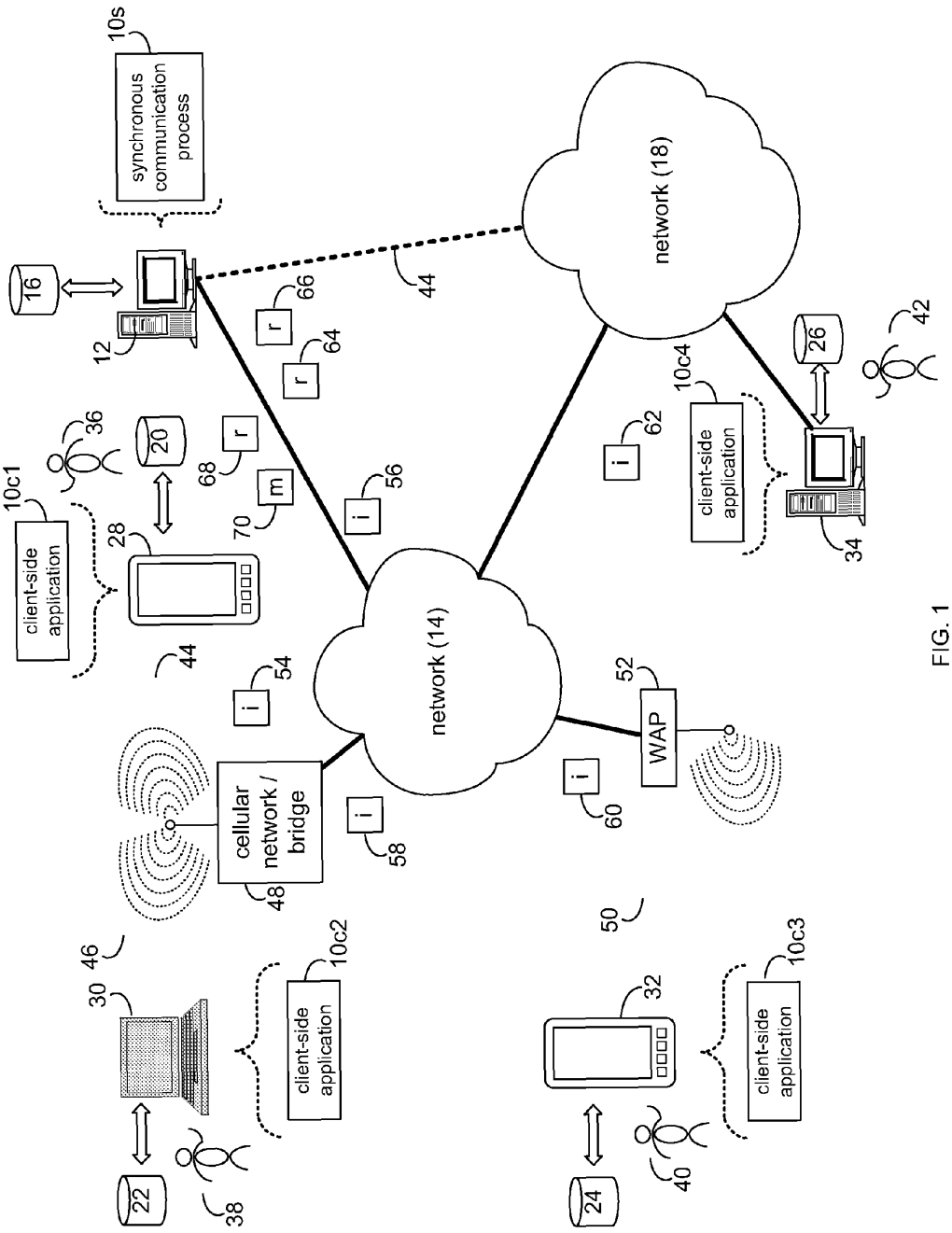
synchronous communication process
10s
16
12
44
network (18)
66
r
64
r
36
20
68
r
70
m
56
i
10c1
client-side application
28
44
54
i
network (14)
cellular network / bridge
48
58
i
52
WAP
60
i
62
i
10c4
client-side application
26
42
34
46
30
22
38
10c2
client-side application
50
32
24
40
10c3
client-side application

FIG. 1

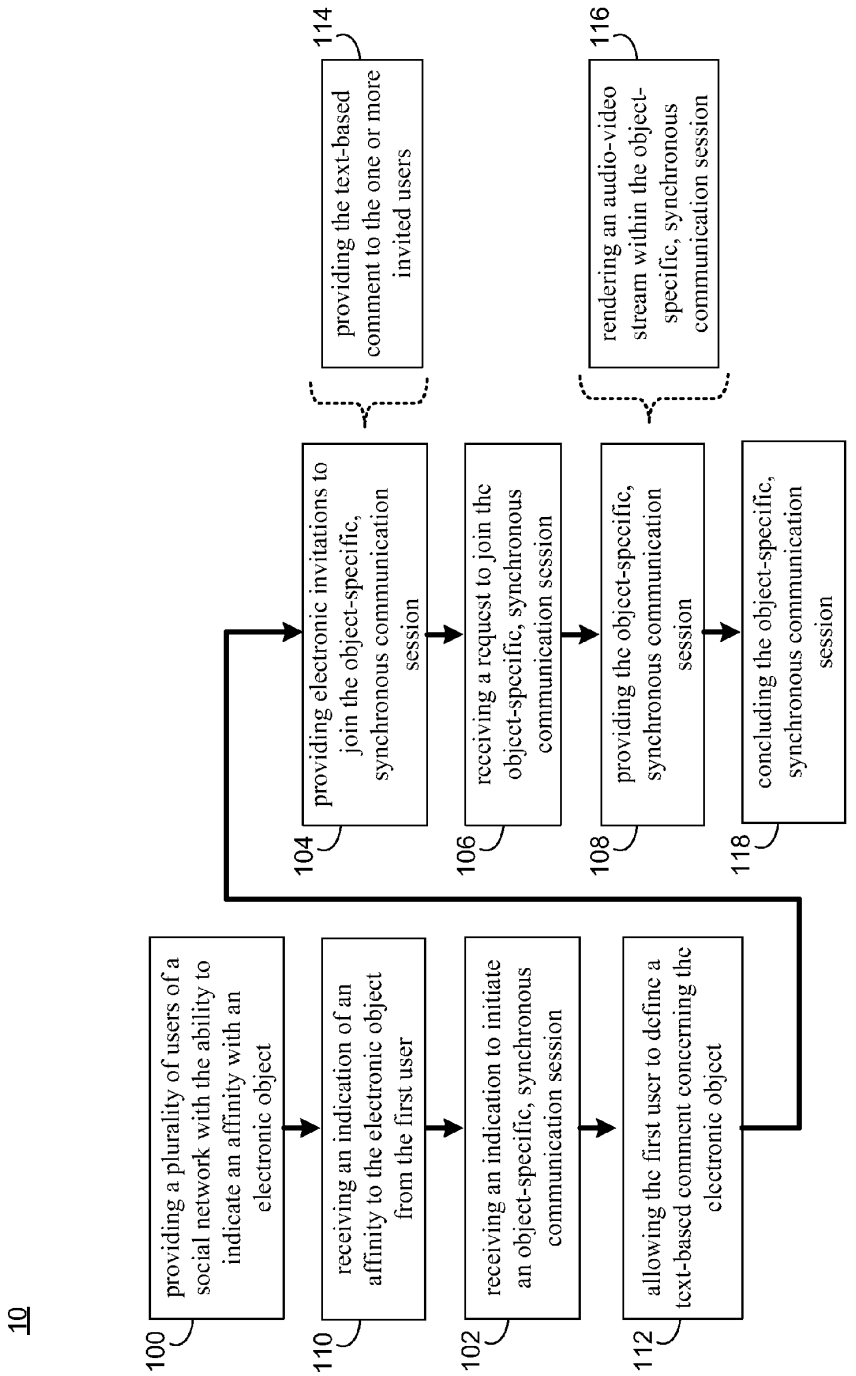
10
100
providing a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate an affinity with an electronic object
110
receiving an indication of an affinity to the electronic object from the first user
102
receiving an indication to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session
112
allowing the first user to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object
104
providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session
114
providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users
106
receiving a request to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session
108
providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session
116
rendering an audio-video stream within the object-specific, synchronous communication session
118
concluding the object-specific, synchronous communication session

FIG. 2

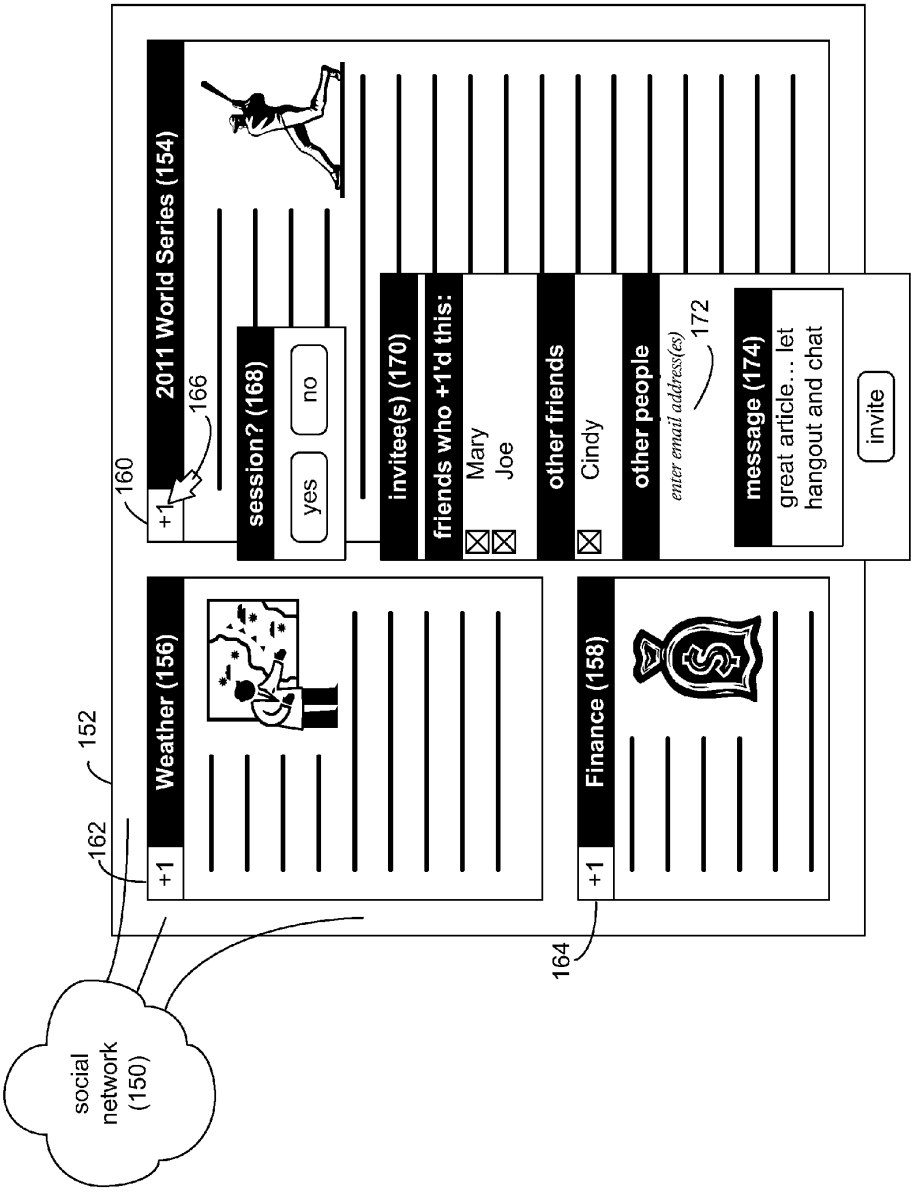
social network (150)
152
162
+1
Weather (156)
+1
2011 World Series (154)
160
166
session? (168)
yes
no
Finance (158)
164
invitee(s) (170)
friends who +1'd this:
Mary
Joe
other friends
Cindy
other people
enter email address(es)
172
message (174)
great article... let hangout and chat
invite

FIG. 3

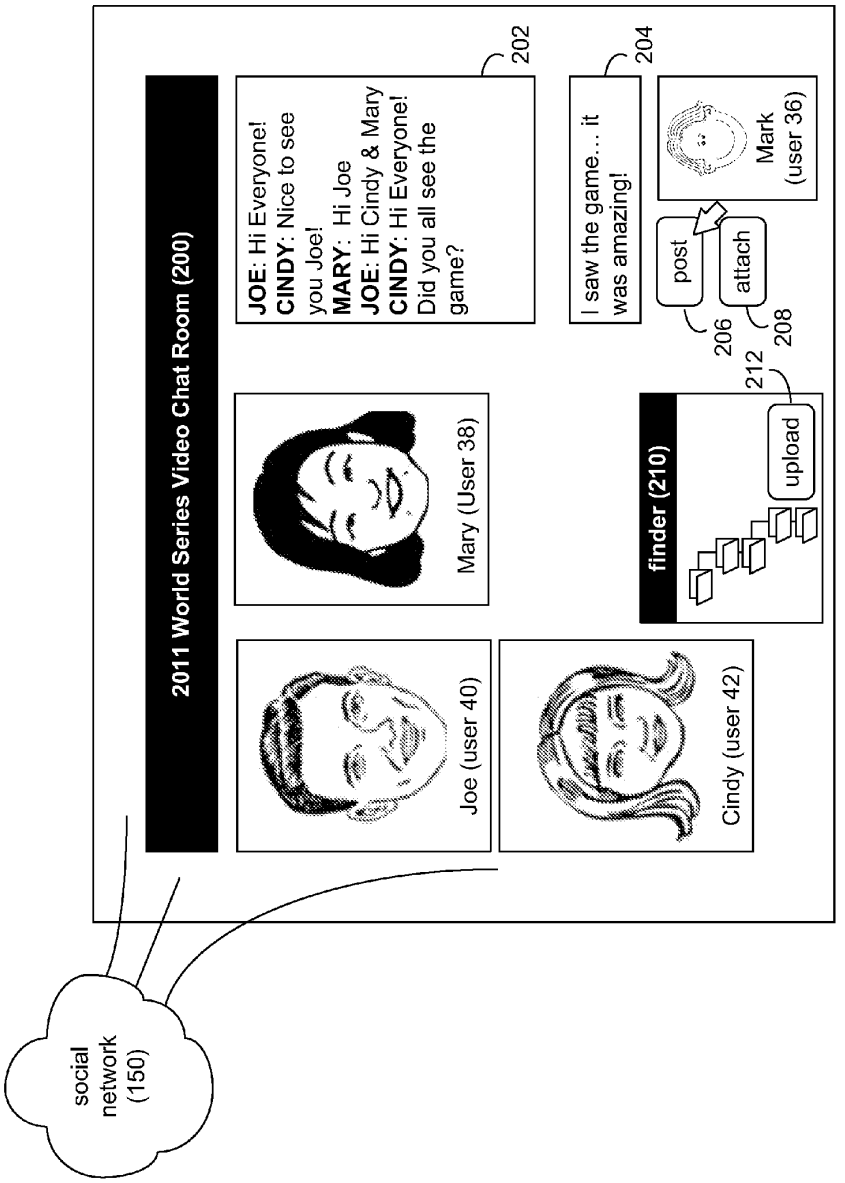
social network (150)
2011 World Series Video Chat Room (200)
Joe (user 40)
Mary (User 38)
Cindy (user 42)
JOE: Hi Everyone!
CINDY: Nice to see you Joe!
MARY: Hi Joe
JOE: Hi Cindy & Mary
CINDY: Hi Everyone! Did you all see the game?
202
I saw the game... it was amazing!
204
post
attach
206
208
Mark (user 36)
finder (210)
upload
212

FIG. 4

SYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEM AND METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

This disclosure relates to object-specific, synchronous communication sessions and, more particularly, to object-specific, synchronous communication sessions that are based upon a defined affinity.

BACKGROUND

The Internet currently allows for the free exchange of ideas and information in a manner that was unimaginable only a couple of decades ago. One such use for the Internet is as a communication medium, whether it is via one-on-one exchanges or multi-party exchanges. For example, two individuals may exchange private emails with each other. Alternatively, multiple people may participate on a public website in which they may post entries that are published for multiple people to read. Examples of such websites may include but are not limited to product/service review sites and topical blogs.

As is known in the art, the phrase social network may be used to refer to a group of technologies (e.g. Web-based and mobile technologies) that allow for users to engage in a quasi-real-time, interactive dialogue. Social networking websites have allowed people to interact and socialize in ways that were unimaginable ten years ago. For example, the use of such social networking websites has allowed for long lost friends to be reunited, long-distance friendships to be easily maintained, and information to be broadcast to groups of people.

Included within some social networking websites is the ability for a user of the social network to publicly define an affinity toward an electronic object (e.g., by associating a "like" or "+1" indicator with the object in question). For example, if a first user of the social network e.g., makes a statement, posts a photo, or identifies a restaurant, another user may publicly state that they e.g., agree/disagree or like/dislike that statement, photo or restaurant.

SUMMARY OF DISCLOSURE

In a first implementation, a method for object-specific, synchronous communication executes on one or more computing devices. The method includes providing, using the one or more computing devices, a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object. An indication is received from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object. Electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session are provided to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network. A request is received, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session is provided for the first user and the at least one of the invited users using the one or more computing devices.

One or more of the following features may be included. An indication of an affinity to the electronic object may be received from the first user using the one or more computing devices. Providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users may include rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

At least one of the invited users may have previously defined an affinity toward the electronic object. At least one of the invited users may be connected to the first user within the social network. The first user may be allowed to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object. Providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session may include providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users. The text-based comment may be used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session may be concluded upon the first user and the at least one of the invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

In another implementation, a computer program product resides on a computer readable medium and has a plurality of instructions stored on it. When executed by a processor, the instructions cause the processor to perform operations including providing, using the one or more computing devices, a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object. An indication is received from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object. Electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session are provided to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network. A request is received, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session is provided for the first user and the at least one of the invited users using the one or more computing devices.

One or more of the following features may be included. An indication of an affinity to the electronic object may be received from the first user using the one or more computing devices. Providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users may include rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

At least one of the invited users may have previously defined an affinity toward the electronic object. At least one of the invited users may be connected to the first user within the social network. The first user may be allowed to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object. Providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session may include providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users. The text-based comment may be used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session may be concluded upon the first user and the at least one of the invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

In another implementation, a computing system includes at least one processor and at least one memory architecture coupled with the at least one processor. One or more software modules are executed on the at least one processor and the at least one memory architecture and perform operation including providing, using the one or more computing devices, a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object. An indication is received from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an

object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object. Electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session are provided to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network. A request is received, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session is provided for the first user and the at least one of the invited users using the one or more computing devices.

One or more of the following features may be included. An indication of an affinity to the electronic object may be received from the first user using the one or more computing devices. Providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users may include rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

At least one of the invited users may have previously defined an affinity toward the electronic object. At least one of the invited users may be connected to the first user within the social network. The first user may be allowed to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object. Providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session may include providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users. The text-based comment may be used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session. The object-specific, synchronous communication session may be concluded upon the first user and the at least one of the invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

The details of one or more implementations are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below. Other features and advantages will become apparent from the description, the drawings, and the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a diagrammatic view of a distributed computing network including a computing device that executes a synchronous communication process;

FIG. **2** is a flowchart of the synchronous communication process of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a diagrammatic view of a display screen rendered by the synchronous communication process of FIG. **1**; and

FIG. **4** is a diagrammatic view of another display screen rendered by the synchronous communication process of FIG. **1**.

Like reference symbols in the various drawings indicate like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

General

As will be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the present disclosure may be embodied as a method, system, or computer program product. Accordingly, the present disclosure may take the form of an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment (including firmware, resident software, micro-code, etc.) or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects that may all generally be referred to herein as a "circuit," "module" or "system." Furthermore, the present disclosure may take the form of a computer program product on a computer-usable storage medium having computer-usable program code embodied in the medium.

Any suitable computer usable or computer readable medium may be utilized. The computer-usable or computer-readable medium may be, for example but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor system, apparatus, device, or propagation medium. More specific examples (a non-exhaustive list) of the computer-readable medium may include the following: an electrical connection having one or more wires, a portable computer diskette, a hard disk, a random access memory (RAM), a read-only memory (ROM), an erasable programmable read-only memory (EPROM or Flash memory), an optical fiber, a portable compact disc read-only memory (CD-ROM), an optical storage device, a transmission media such as those supporting the Internet or an intranet, or a magnetic storage device. Note that the computer-usable or computer-readable medium could even be paper or another suitable medium upon which the program is printed, as the program can be electronically captured, via, for instance, optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted, or otherwise processed in a suitable manner, if necessary, and then stored in a computer memory. In the context of this document, a computer-usable or computer-readable medium may be any medium that can contain, store, communicate, propagate, or transport the program for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device. The computer-usable medium may include a propagated data signal with the computer-usable program code embodied therewith, either in baseband or as part of a carrier wave. The computer usable program code may be transmitted using any appropriate medium, including but not limited to the Internet, wireline, optical fiber cable, RF, etc.

Computer program code for carrying out operations of the present disclosure may be written in an object oriented programming language such as Java, Smalltalk, C++ or the like. However, the computer program code for carrying out operations of the present disclosure may also be written in conventional procedural programming languages, such as the "C" programming language or similar programming languages. The program code may execute entirely on the user's computer, partly on the user's computer, as a stand-alone software package, partly on the user's computer and partly on a remote computer or entirely on the remote computer or server. In the latter scenario, the remote computer may be connected to the user's computer through a local area network (LAN) or a wide area network (WAN), or the connection may be made to an external computer (for example, through the Internet using an Internet Service Provider).

The present disclosure is described below with reference to flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams of methods, apparatus (systems) and computer program products according to embodiments of the disclosure. It will be understood that each block of the flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams, and combinations of blocks in the flowchart illustrations and/or block diagrams, can be implemented by computer program instructions. These computer program instructions may be provided to a processor of a general purpose computer, special purpose computer, or other programmable data processing apparatus to produce a machine, such that the instructions, which execute via the processor of the computer or other programmable data processing apparatus, create means for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

These computer program instructions may also be stored in a computer-readable memory that may direct a computer or

other programmable data processing apparatus to function in a particular manner, such that the instructions stored in the computer-readable memory produce an article of manufacture including instruction means which implement the function/act specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

The computer program instructions may also be loaded onto a computer or other programmable data processing apparatus to cause a series of operational steps to be performed on the computer or other programmable apparatus to produce a computer implemented process such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus provide steps for implementing the functions/acts specified in the flowchart and/or block diagram block or blocks.

System Overview:

In FIGS. **1** & **2**, there is shown synchronous communication process **10**. Synchronous communication process **10** may be implemented as a server-side process, a client-side process, or a hybrid server-side/client-side process. For example, synchronous communication process **10** may be implemented as a purely server-side process via synchronous communication process **10***s*. Alternatively, synchronous communication process **10** may be implemented as a purely client-side process via one or more of client-side application **10***c***1**, client-side application **10***c***2**, client-side application **10***c***3**, and client-side application **10***c***4**. Alternatively still, synchronous communication process **10** may be implemented as a hybrid server-side/client-side process via synchronous communication process **10***s* in combination with one or more of client-side application **10***c***1**, client-side application **10***c***2**, client-side application **10***c***3**, and client-side application **10***c***4**. Accordingly, synchronous communication process **10** as used in this disclosure may include any combination of synchronous communication process **10***s*, client-side application **10***c***1**, client-side application **10***c***2**, client-side application **10***c***3**, and client-side application **10***c***4**.

As will be discussed below in greater detail, synchronous communication process **10** may provide **100** a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate an affinity with an electronic object. Synchronous communication process **10** may receive **102** an indication from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object, and may provide **104** electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network. Synchronous communication process **10** may receive **106** a request, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session, and may provide **108** the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users.

Synchronous communication process **10***s* may be a server application and may reside on and may be executed by computing device **12**, which may be connected to network **14** (e.g., the Internet or a local area network). Examples of computing device **12** may include, but are not limited to: a personal computer, a laptop computer, a personal digital assistant, a data-enabled cellular telephone, a notebook computer, a television with one or more processors embedded therein or coupled thereto, a server computer, a series of server computers, a mini computer, a mainframe computer, or a dedicated network device.

The instruction sets and subroutines of synchronous communication process $\mathbf{10}_s$, which may be stored on storage device **16** coupled to computing device **12**, may be executed by one or more processors (not shown) and one or more memory architectures (not shown) included within computing device **12**. Examples of storage device **16** may include but are not limited to: a hard disk drive; a tape drive; an optical drive; a RAID device; a random access memory (RAM); a read-only memory (ROM); and all forms of flash memory storage devices.

Network **14** may be connected to one or more secondary networks (e.g., network **18**), examples of which may include but are not limited to: a local area network; a wide area network; or an intranet, for example.

Examples of client-side applications **10***c***1**, **10***c***2**, **10***c***3**, **10***c***4** may include but are not limited to a web browser, a game console user interface, or a specialized application (e.g., an application running on e.g., the Android™ platform and the iPhone™ platform). The instruction sets and subroutines of client-side application **10***c***1**, **10***c***2**, **10***c***3**, **10***c***4**, which may be stored on storage devices **20**, **22**, **24**, **26** (respectively) coupled to client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34** (respectively), may be executed by one or more processors (not shown) and one or more memory architectures (not shown) incorporated into client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34** (respectively). Examples of storage devices **20**, **22**, **24**, **26** may include but are not limited to: hard disk drives; tape drives; optical drives; RAID devices; random access memories (RAM); read-only memories (ROM), and all forms of flash memory storage devices.

Examples of client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34** may include, but are not limited to, data-enabled, cellular telephone **28**, laptop computer **30**, personal digital assistant **32**, personal computer **34**, a notebook computer (not shown), a server computer (not shown), a gaming console (not shown), and a dedicated network device (not shown). Client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34** may each execute an operating system, examples of which may include but are not limited to Microsoft Windows™, Android™, WebOS™, iOS™, Redhat Linux™, or a custom operating system.

Users **36**, **38**, **40**, **42** may access synchronous communication process **10** directly through network **14** or through secondary network **18**. Further, synchronous communication process **10** may be connected to network **14** through secondary network **18**, as illustrated with link line **44**.

The various client electronic devices (e.g., client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34**) may be directly or indirectly coupled to network **14** (or network **18**). For example, data-enabled, cellular telephone **28** and laptop computer **30** are shown wirelessly coupled to network **14** via wireless communication channels **44**, **46** (respectively) established between data-enabled, cellular telephone **28**, laptop computer **30** (respectively) and cellular network/bridge **48**, which is shown directly coupled to network **14**. Further, personal digital assistant **32** is shown wirelessly coupled to network **14** via wireless communication channel **50** established between personal digital assistant **32** and wireless access point (i.e., WAP) **52**, which is shown directly coupled to network **14**. Additionally, personal computer **34** is shown directly coupled to network **18** via a hardwired network connection.

WAP **52** may be, for example, an IEEE 802.11a, 802.11b, 802.11g, 802.11n, Wi-Fi, and/or Bluetooth device that is capable of establishing wireless communication channel **50** between personal digital assistant **32** and WAP **52**. As is known in the art, IEEE 802.11x specifications may use Ethernet protocol and carrier sense multiple access with collision avoidance (i.e., CSMA/CA) for path sharing. The various 802.11x specifications may use phase-shift keying (i.e., PSK) modulation or complementary code keying (i.e., CCK) modulation, for example. As is known in the art, Bluetooth is

a telecommunications industry specification that allows e.g., mobile phones, computers, and personal digital assistants to be interconnected using a short-range wireless connection.

Example Synchronous Communication Processes:

As discussed above, some social networking websites provide the ability for a user of the social network to publicly define an affinity toward an object (e.g., by associating a "like" or "+1" indicator with the object in question). This disclosure concerns a methodology for increasing the use of such features within these social networking websites.

Specifically and as is known, the Google+™ social network includes a feature in which users of Google+™ can "+1" a particular electronic object (e.g. a URL, an article, an application, a Google defined object ID), wherein when a user +1's an object, the user is publicly announcing (e.g., within the social network) their affinity towards that object.

Further included within social networks is the ability of users of the social network to participate in-group communication sessions. For example, Google+™ allows users of this social network to participate in "hangouts", which are multiuser video chat rooms that allow for virtual gatherings of people so that they may chat about specific topics. Synchronous communication process **10** may leverage the use of Google™ "hangouts" to enhance the usability of the "+1" feature within Google+™.

Specifically and as will be discussed below in greater detail, when a user identifies an object that they wish to "+1", the user may also initiate a "hangout" concerning that specific object. For example, if a user wished to "+1" an article on a sports website concerning the 2011 World Series, the user may choose to initiate a "hangout" concerning this article. The user may also enter a text-based message concerning this article (e.g. "this is a really great article . . . let's chat about it") and may use that as an endorsement of the article and an enticement to join the "hangout". The user may identify one or more people (e.g. in the form of individual friends within Google+™, circles of friends within Google+™, and/or individual e-mail addresses) that the user may invite to participate in this "hangout". The user may also be provided with information concerning whether any of these potential invitees have previously +1'd this article. If the person being invited was already a member of Google+™, that person may simply be asked to participate in the "hangout". Alternatively, if the person being invited was not a member of Google+™, that person may first be asked to join Google+™ and, upon joining Google+™, may be asked to participate in the "hangout". As this "hangout" may be dynamically generated in response to a user's request concerning a specific entity, this hangout may be maintained until the last participant in the "hangout" leaves the "hangout", at which point it may no longer be accessible.

While the above discussion concerned Google+™, this is for illustrative purposes only and is not intended to be a limitation of this disclosure. For example, synchronous communication process **10** may be included within or utilized by any social networking website.

Referring also to FIG. **3**, synchronous communication process **10** may be included within, executed within, or a portion of a social network (e.g., social network **150**). As discussed above, the phrase social network may be used to refer to a group of technologies (e.g. web-based and mobile technologies) that allow for users to engage in a quasi-real-time, interactive dialogue.

Assume for illustrative purposes that user **36** (i.e. Mark) is reviewing e.g. a news website (e.g. website **152**) that includes various articles (e.g. articles **154**, **156**, **158**). Assume that article **154** (i.e. an article on the 2011 World Series) is of particular interest to user **36**.

Synchronous communication process **10** may be configured to provide **100** users of social network **150** (e.g., user **36**, **38**, **40**, **42**) with the ability to indicate an affinity with an electronic object (e.g., one or more of the articles includes within website **152**). For example, synchronous communication process **10** may render "+1" buttons **160**, **162**, **164**, each of which may be associated with a particular article. For example, "+1" button **160** may be associated with article **154**, "+1" button **162** may be associated with article **156**, and "+1" button **164** may be associated with article **158**,

Accordingly and continuing with the above-stated example, assume that user **36** wishes to show an affinity to article **154** in the form of "liking" or "+1ing" the article. Accordingly, user **36** may select "+1" button **160** (which is associated with article **154**) via onscreen pointer **166** (which may be controllable by a pointing device, such as a mouse (not shown)).

Upon user **36** making this selection, synchronous communication process **10** may receive **110** an indication (e.g., indication **54**) that user **36** defined an affinity to this electronic object (i.e., article **154**). Upon receiving **110** indication **54**, synchronous communication process **10** may render session initiation window **168** that may allow users **36** to choose whether or not they wish to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object to which they defined an affinity (namely article **154**). For example, if user **36** wishes to initiate such an object-specific, synchronous communication session, user **36** may select the "yes" button included within session initiation window **168**. Alternatively, if user **36** does not wish to initiate such an object-specific, synchronous communication session, user **36** may select the "no" button included within session initiation window **168**.

Referring also to FIG. **4**, assume for illustrative purposes that user **36** wishes to initiate such an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning article **154**. Accordingly, user **36** may select the "yes" button included within session initiation window **168**, resulting in the generation of indication **56**. Upon synchronous communication process **10** receiving **102** indication **56** from user **36**, synchronous communication process **10** may render invitation window **170** that may be configured to allow user **36** to identify invitee(s) for the object-specific, synchronous communication session that user **36** wishes to initiate.

Invitation window **170** may be configured to allow user **36** to invite various types of individuals to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** concerning article **54**. For example, invitation window **170** may be configured to identify members of social network **150** that have previously defined an affinity toward the electronic object (e.g., article **54**). For example, assume that Mary (i.e., user **38**) and Joe (i.e., user **40**) are both members of social network **150** and have both previously identified an affinity toward article **154**. Accordingly, if users **38**, **40** are available, they may wish to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

Further, invitation window **170** may be configured to identify members of social network **150** that are connected to user **36** within social network **150** but have not previously defined an affinity toward article **54**. For example, assume that Cindy (user **42**) is friends with/connected to/in a circle with user **36** in social network **150**. However and unlike users **38**, **40**, user **42** has not previously defined an affinity toward article **54**.

In the event that user **36** wishes to invite any of users **38**, **40**, **42** to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**, user **36** may check the appropriate check box next to the name of the user(s) that they wish to invite.

Additionally, invitation window **170** may be configured to allow user **36** to invite people that are not members of social network **150**. Accordingly, user **36** may populate email field **172** with the email address(es) of people that that they wish to invite to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** but are currently not members of social network **150**.

Invitation window **170** may include message field **174** that may allow **112** user **36** to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object (i.e., article **154**). For example, user **36** may add the comment "great article . . . let's hangout and chat" concerning article **154**. Accordingly, the text-based comment may be used as a descriptor for object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

Once the appropriate people are identified within invitation window **170** (thus defining a group of invited users), user **36** may select (via onscreen pointer **166**) the "invite" button included within invitation window **170** and synchronous communication process **10** may provide **104** to the invited users electronic invitations to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. For example, synchronous communication process **10** may provide invitations **58**, **60**, **62** to users **38**, **40**, **42** (respectively). When providing **104** invitations **58**, **60**, **62** to users **38**, **40**, **42**, synchronous communication process **10** may also provide **114** the above-described text-based comment concerning article **154** within invitations **58**, **60**, **62**.

If the person being invited to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** was not a member of social network **150**, that person may first be asked to join social network **150** and, upon joining social network **150**, may be asked to participate in object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

While the following discussion concerns object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** being an audio-video, object-specific, synchronous communication session, this is for illustrative purposes only and is not intended to be a limitation of this disclosure, as other configurations are possible (e.g., a multi-user, audio-only chat room) and are considered to be within the scope of this disclosure.

Upon receiving invitations **58**, **60**, **62**, users **38**, **40**, **42** may either accept or reject the same. Assume for illustrative purposes that each of users **38**, **40**, **42** accepts their invitation to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. Upon a user accepting one of the above-described invitations, a corresponding request (e.g., requests **64**, **66**, **68**) to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** may be provided to synchronous communication process **10**.

Accordingly, upon synchronous communication process **10** receiving **106** request **64**, **66**, **68** from e.g., users **38**, **40**, **42** (respectively), synchronous communication process **10** may provide **108** object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** for the user initiating object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** (e.g., user **36**) and the user(s) who accepted the invitation (users **38**, **40**, **42**).

As discussed above, object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** may be an audio-video, object-specific, synchronous communication session. Accordingly, when providing **108** object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** to users, **36**, **38**, **40**, **42**, synchronous communication process **10** may render **116** an audio-video stream (e.g., generated by a webcam/microphone included within client electronic devices **28**, **30**, **32**, **34** (respectively)) received from e.g., users **36**, **38**, **40**, **42** within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

Once the object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** is initiated by social network **150**, users **36**, **38**, **40**, **42** may be permitted to participate within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. For example and as discussed above, users **36**, **38**, **40**, **42** may be allowed to provide an audio-video stream to object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**, so that the participating users may "appear" as an audio-video stream within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

In addition to the above-described audio & video based communication, synchronous communication process **10** may be configured to render text-based chat window **202** within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**, thus enabling text-based participation within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. For example, object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** may be configured to allow user **36** to post a text-based message within text-based chat window **202**. Accordingly user **36** may compose their message (e.g., "I saw the game . . . it was amazing!") within message composition window **204** and select "post" button **206**, resulting in the generation of text-based message **70**, which may be provided to synchronous communication process **10**. Upon receiving text-based message **70** from user **36**, synchronous communication process **10** may render text-based message **70** within text-based chat window **202** of object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

Additionally/alternatively, synchronous communication process **10** may be configured to allow user **36** to upload files (e.g., photographs, video recordings, audio recordings) that are owned by user **36** to the object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. For example, if user **36** was at one of the games of the 2011 World Series and took a picture of an amazing play at home plate, user **36** may upload that photograph to object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**, thus allowing user **36** to share that photograph with e.g., users **38**, **40**, **42**. Accordingly, user **36** may select "attach" button **208**, which may render finder window **210** that may allow user **36** to select the appropriate file for upload. Once the appropriate file is selected, user **36** may select "upload" button **212**, resulting in the selected file being uploaded by synchronous communication process **10** and made available within object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

As object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** is not a persistent communication session, a minimum number of participants may be required for object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** to be maintained. Accordingly, synchronous communication process **10** may conclude **118** object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** upon all of users **36**, **38**, **40**, **42** no longer participating in object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**.

Synchronous communication process **10** may be configured to allow the various users of social network **150** to opt in/out of the various aspects of object-specific, synchronous communication session **200**. For example, synchronous communication process **10** may be configured so that a user cannot be invited to join object-specific, synchronous communication session **200** unless e.g., they proactively choose to allow all invitations or they are connected to the inviting user. Additionally, a user of social network **150** may configure synchronous communication process **10** so that the above-described service (i.e., being able to initiate object-specific,

synchronous communication session **200** based upon defining an affinity) is not provided to the user.

Additional Example Embodiments

As will be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the present disclosure may be embodied as a method, system, or computer program product. Accordingly, the present disclosure may take the form of an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment (including firmware, resident software, micro-code, etc.) or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects that may all generally be referred to herein as a "circuit," "module" or "system." Furthermore, the present disclosure may take the form of a computer program product on a computer-usable storage medium having computer-usable program code embodied in the medium.

The flowchart and block diagrams in the Figures illustrate the architecture, functionality, and operation of possible implementations of systems, methods and computer program products according to various embodiments of the present disclosure. In this regard, each block in the flowchart or block diagrams may represent a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified logical function(s). It should also be noted that, in some alternative implementations, the functions noted in the block may occur out of the order noted in the figures. For example, two blocks shown in succession may, in fact, be executed substantially concurrently, or the blocks may sometimes be executed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. It will also be noted that each block of the block diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, and combinations of blocks in the block diagrams and/or flowchart illustration, can be implemented by special purpose hardware-based systems that perform the specified functions or acts, or combinations of special purpose hardware and computer instructions.

The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the disclosure. As used herein, the singular forms "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will be further understood that the terms "comprises" and/or "comprising," when used in this specification, specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof.

The corresponding structures, materials, acts, and equivalents of all means or step plus function elements in the claims below are intended to include any structure, material, or act for performing the function in combination with other claimed elements as specifically claimed. The description of the present disclosure has been presented for purposes of illustration and description, but is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the disclosure in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the scope and spirit of the disclosure. The embodiment was chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the disclosure and the practical application, and to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the disclosure for various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.

Having thus described the disclosure of the present application in detail and by reference to embodiments thereof, it will be apparent that modifications and variations are possible without departing from the scope of the disclosure defined in the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for object-specific, synchronous communication, executing on one or more computing devices, the method comprising:

providing, using the one or more computing devices, a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object by selection of a button that is associated with the electronic object;

receiving, using the one or more computing devices, indications of affinity to the electronic object from each user of a group of users from the plurality of users;

receiving, an initiation request from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object;

providing first electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to one or more invited users of the group;

receiving a join request, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session; and

providing, using the one or more computing devices, the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users.

2. The method of claim **1** wherein the first user is connected to the plurality of users within the social network, the method further comprising:

providing the first user with information about the plurality of users including a first list of the group of users that provided the indications of affinity to the electronic object and a second list of remaining users from the plurality of users that did not provide the indications of affinity to the electronic object.

3. The method of claim **1** wherein providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users includes:

rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

receiving an email address for a second user that is not a member of the social network; and

providing a second electronic invitation to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to the email address for the second user.

5. The method of claim **4** wherein the second electronic invitation includes a social network request for the second user to join the social network prior to participation in the synchronous communication session.

6. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

allowing the first user to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object.

7. The method of claim **6** wherein providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session further includes:

providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users.

8. The method of claim **7** wherein the text-based comment is used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

9. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

concluding the object-specific, synchronous communication session upon the first user and the at least one of the

invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

10. A computer program product residing on a non-transitory computer readable medium having a plurality of instructions stored thereon which, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to perform operations comprising:

providing a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object by selection of a graphical icon that is associated with the electronic object;

receiving, an initiation request from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object;

providing first electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to one or more invited users of the plurality of users of the social network;

receiving a first join request, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session;

providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users;

receiving a second join request for a second user that is not a member of the social network; and

providing a second electronic invitation to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to the second user, the second electronic invitation including a social network request for the second user to join the social network prior to participation in the synchronous communication session.

11. The computer program product of claim **10** further comprising instructions for:

receiving an indication of affinity to the electronic object from the first user.

12. The computer program product of claim **10** wherein the instructions for providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users include instructions for:

rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

13. The computer program product of claim **10** wherein the instructions further cause the processor to perform operations comprising:

receiving indications of affinity to the electronic object from a group of users from the plurality of users,

wherein the first electronic invitations are provided to each of the users in the group.

14. The computer program product of claim **10** wherein at least one of the invited users is connected to the first user within the social network and wherein the instructions further cause the processor to perform operations comprising:

providing the first user with information about the plurality of users including a first list of the group of users that provided the indications of affinity to the electronic object and a second list of remaining users from the plurality of users that did not provide the indications of affinity to the electronic object.

15. The computer program product of claim **10** further comprising instructions for:

allowing the first user to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object.

16. The computer program product of claim **15** wherein the instructions for providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session further includes instructions for:

providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users.

17. The computer program product of claim **16** wherein the text-based comment is used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

18. The computer program product of claim **10** further comprising instructions for:

concluding the object-specific, synchronous communication session upon the first user and the at least one of the invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

19. A computing system comprising:

at least one processor;

at least one memory architecture coupled with the at least one processor;

one or more software modules executed on the at least one processor and the at least one memory architecture, wherein the one or more software modules are configured to perform operations including:

providing a plurality of users of a social network with the ability to indicate affinity with an electronic object by selection of a button that is associated with the electronic object;

receiving indications of affinity to the electronic object from each user of a group of users from the plurality of users;

receiving, an initiation request from a first user of the plurality of users to initiate an object-specific, synchronous communication session concerning the electronic object;

providing first electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to one or more invited users of the group;

receiving a first join request, from at least one of the invited users, to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session; and

providing, using the one or more computing devices, the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users.

20. The computing system of claim **19** wherein the first user is connected to the plurality of users within the social network and the one or more software modules are further configured to perform operations comprising:

providing the first user with information about the plurality of users including a first list of the group of users that provided the indications of affinity to the electronic object and a second list of remaining users from the plurality of users that did not provide the indications of affinity to the electronic object.

21. The computing system of claim **19** wherein providing the object-specific, synchronous communication session for the first user and the at least one of the invited users includes:

rendering an audio-video stream received from one or more of the first user and the at least one of the invited users within the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

22. The computing system of claim **19** wherein the one or more software modules are further configured to perform operations comprising:

receiving a second join request for a second user that is not a member of the social network; and

providing a second electronic invitation to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session to the second user.

23. The computing system of claim **22** wherein the second electronic invitation includes a social network request for the second user to join the social network prior to participation in the synchronous communication session.

24. The computing system of claim **19** further configured to perform operations comprising:

allowing the first user to define a text-based comment concerning the electronic object.

25. The computing system of claim **24** wherein providing electronic invitations to join the object-specific, synchronous communication session further includes:

providing the text-based comment to the one or more invited users.

26. The computing system of claim **25** wherein the text-based comment is used as a descriptor for the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

27. The computing system of claim **19** wherein the one or more software modules are further configured to perform operations comprising:

concluding the object-specific, synchronous communication session upon the first user and the at least one of the invited users no longer participating in the object-specific, synchronous communication session.

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