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Inventor(s)	Lewis; Justin et al.

Anchors for live streams

Abstract

An application on a viewer client device receives a user input to access a live stream, sends a request to access the live stream, presents information allowing a user to indicate a first anchor of a plurality of anchors of the live stream, the first anchor corresponding to a timestamp for starting a portion of the live stream, receives user input identifying the live stream and user input indicating the first anchor of the live stream, and displays the live stream beginning at the timestamp corresponding to the first anchor of the live stream.

Inventors: Lewis; Justin (Marina del Rey, CA), Davies; Scott (Santa Monica, CA)

Applicant: Google LLC (Mountain View, CA)

Family ID: 1000008749803

Assignee: Google LLC (Mountain View, CA)

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Primary Examiner: Gilles; Jude Jean

Attorney, Agent or Firm: Lowenstein Sandler LLP

Background/Summary

RELATED APPLICATIONS (1) This application is a continuation application of co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/392,154, Aug. 2, 2021, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/872,351, filed May 11, 2020, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,082,468, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/339,874, filed Oct. 31, 2016, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,652,294, each of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

(1) This disclosure generally relates to live streams, and more specifically, to generating anchors in a live stream to enable users that are joining or rejoining the live stream to enter at an opportune time.

(2) Stream hosting servers, such as YOUTUBE, serve as a platform for stream creators to provide live streams to users of the stream hosting server. In many scenarios, a user uses a client device to access and join the live stream. For popular streams, a creator of a stream may achieve large numbers of viewers who are interested in the information being presented by the creator.

(3) However, a problem unique to live streams is that viewers may join at various, suboptimal times. For example, the creator may be in the middle of a discussion when a viewer joins and thus, the viewer may not have the proper context to fully understand the ongoing discussion. This scenario may occur when a user is newly joining the live stream or when the user is rejoining the live stream after previously having been diverted away. Joining a live stream at a suboptimal

moment leads to a poor user experience and may even demotivate users from partaking in future live streams.

SUMMARY

(4) A stream hosting server generates anchors in a live stream that enables users that are newly joining to begin consuming the streaming content at an opportune time point, even if the user joins at a suboptimal time. The stream hosting server provides a platform for a creator to transmit live streams. At various time points during the live stream, the server provides user interface elements that receive creator input indicating that a time point is appropriate for the generation of a live stream anchor. For example, the user interface elements receive an input to create an anchor when the creator is moving on to discuss a new subject matter. In another example, the live stream is a streaming video game and the user interface elements receive an input to generate an anchor corresponding to a timestamp in the live stream when a new game is starting. Each anchor specifies a timestamp of the live stream as well as a validity duration. The validity duration of the anchor describes how long the anchor remains valid such that users that join can start watching the live stream at the anchor if the anchor is valid.

(5) A viewer client device provides a request to the stream hosting server to join a live stream. The request sent by the client device is sent at a particular time and is therefore, associated with a timestamp of the live stream. In one embodiment, the stream hosting server analyzes the list of generated anchors and identifies an appropriate anchor from which the viewer client device will begin accessing the live stream. The appropriate anchor is selected based on the timestamp of the live stream specified by the anchor and the validity duration associated with the anchor. The stream hosting server provides the live stream to the viewer client device beginning at the timestamp specified by the identified anchor.

(6) The stream hosting server may also be capable of generating video on demand (VOD) content derived from a completed live stream. Additionally, the generated anchors associated with the completed live stream are also included in the created VOD. The anchors in the VOD serve multiple purposes. In one scenario, the VOD can be presented by a viewer client device to a user. Upon receiving user inputs, the viewer client device can display the VOD at different timestamps that are specified by the anchors associated with the VOD. This is desirable in gaming streams where conversational scenes of a VOD can be rapidly skipped over. Thus, the VOD with associated anchors enables skipping to the beginning of the next game.

(7) Additionally, the anchors in a VOD may be tagged with a subject matter tag such as a keyword. When the stream hosting server receives a query including a keyword (or subject matter tag more generally), the stream hosting server returns a list of anchors that are relevant to the provided keyword. Thus, the server enables a viewer client device to access a VOD beginning at an anchor with a particularly relevant subject as opposed to having to display the VOD from the beginning.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- (1) FIG. 1 is a system environment of a stream hosting server, in accordance with an embodiment.
- (2) FIG. 2 depicts the architecture of the live stream module, in accordance with an embodiment.
- (3) FIG. 3A depicts the architecture of a software module of the creator client device, in accordance with an embodiment.
- (4) FIG. 3B depicts the architecture of a software module of the viewer client device, in accordance with an embodiment.
- (5) FIG. 4 is an example flow chart of providing, by the stream hosting server, a live stream based on a generated anchor, in accordance with an embodiment.
- (6) FIG. 5 is an example flow chart of playing back, by a viewer client device, a live stream

according to a generated anchor, in accordance with an embodiment.

(7) The figures depict various embodiments for purposes of illustration only. One skilled in the art will readily recognize from the following discussion that alternative embodiments of the structures and methods illustrated herein may be employed without departing from the principles of the invention described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview of System Environment

(8) FIG. 1 depicts a system environment **100** of a stream hosting server **150** for providing a live stream, in accordance with an embodiment. The system environment **100** includes a creator client device **108**, a viewer client device **110**, a network **130**, and a stream hosting server **150**.

(9) Turning to the individual entities illustrated in FIG. 1, the creator client device **108** and the viewer client device **110** generate a live stream and accesses a live stream, respectively. As used herein, a “live stream” relates to any streamed media content distributed between creators and viewers (or listeners, in the case of audio content), regardless of whether that content is broadcast, multicast, or directly exchanged between a creator and a single viewer.

(10) Each of the creator client device **108** and the viewer client device **110** is a computing device with a software module **300A/B** that transmits and/or receives data via the network **130**. Examples of the creator client devices **108** and viewer client devices **110** include desktop computers, laptop computers, tablet computers (pads), mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), gaming devices, or any other electronic device including computing functionality and data communication capabilities. The creator client device **108** and viewer client device **110** may each use a web browser, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Apple Safari and/or Opera, as an interface to connect with the network **130**. Additionally or alternatively, specialized application software that runs natively on a mobile device is used as an interface to connect to the network **130**. The creator **108** and viewer client devices **110** typically include a processor, a display device (or output to a display device), a local storage, such as a hard drive or flash memory device, to which the creator **108** and viewer client devices **110** store data used by the user in performing tasks, and a network interface for coupling to the stream hosting server **150** via the network **130**. Although FIG. 1 depicts one creator client device **108** and one viewer client device **110**, one skilled in the art may appreciate that any number of creator client devices **108** and viewer client devices **110** may exist in the system architecture in communication with the network **130** and the stream hosting server **150**.

(11) The creator client device **108** is used by a creator to generate a live stream. The creator client device **108** receives user inputs through the user interface **180**. For example, creator client device **108** (e.g. a laptop) receives inputs that instruct the creator client device **108** to use software or hardware to continuously capture video and audio in real time or near-real time for generating the live stream. In various embodiments, the creator client device **108** also includes a software module **300A** that appropriately processes the video and audio of the live stream as it is recorded. The creator client device **108** then continuously transmits the stream to the stream hosting server **150** until the stream ends.

(12) The viewer client device **110** sends a request to access the live stream and upon receiving the live stream, begins to access the live stream at a timestamp specified by an anchor associated with the live stream. The viewer client device **110** includes a user interface **180** and a software module **300B** that together handle the interaction between a user of the viewer client device **110** and content provided by the stream hosting server **150**.

(13) For example, the user interface **180** receives a user input (e.g. a click, a touch input) to join a live stream. The software module **300** sends a join request to the stream hosting server **150** for the live stream. At a time subsequent to sending the join request, the software module **300** receives the live stream with an identified anchor that specifies a timestamp of the live stream. Upon receiving the live stream, the software module **300** appropriately decodes the video and audio of the live

stream for playback on a user interface **180** of the viewer client device **110**. The viewer client device **110** proceeds to display the live stream beginning at the timestamp specified by the anchor. (14) The stream hosting server **150** is responsible for receiving live streams from creator client devices **108**, generating anchors associated with the live stream under a variety of circumstances, for example in response to an anchor generation request from a creator client device **108**, and providing the live stream for playback on a number of different viewer client devices, each possibly starting and progressing forward from different timestamps within the stream as specified by one or more anchors. In an example embodiment, the stream hosting server **150** includes a live stream module **200**, content server **104**, ingest server **106**, content store **120**.

(15) The live stream module **200** handles live streams. On the server side, the live stream module **200** receives a stream to be transmitted to viewer client devices **110** and also receives anchor generation requests. As introduced above, each anchor specifies a timestamp in the live stream such that the live stream module **200** can provide the live stream to a viewer client device **110** beginning at the timestamp. On the viewer side, the live stream module **200** receives join requests from one or more viewer client devices **110** to join the live stream. The live stream module **200** analyzes and identifies an appropriate anchor associated with the live stream for each join request. The live stream module **200** provides the viewer client device **110** with the live stream and the anchor specifying a timestamp in the live stream such that the viewer client device **110** can begin playing the live stream beginning at the timestamp. Further details regarding the live stream module **200** is described below in regards to FIG. 2.

(16) The live stream module **200** is also responsible for providing content items (e.g. video advertisements) to viewer client devices **110**. For example, the content item may be originally provided by a third party system (e.g. an advertiser) and received by the ingest server **106**. The ingest server **106** handles the provided content item and stores the content item in the content store **120**. The content server **104** retrieves a content item that is located in the content store **120** and serves the content item to a viewer client device **110** to be displayed on the user interface **180** of the viewer client device **110**. As one example, the content item is to be displayed on the viewer client device **110** to temporarily replace the live stream. Once the viewer client device **110** plays the content item for its duration, the viewer client device **110** returns to playing the live stream at a generated anchor.

(17) The network **130** facilitates communications amongst one or more client devices **110** and the stream hosting server **150**. The network **130** may be any wired or wireless local area network (LAN) and/or wide area network (WAN), such as an intranet, an extranet, or the Internet. In various embodiments, the network **130** uses standard communication technologies and/or protocols. Examples of technologies used by the network **130** include Ethernet, 802.11, 3G, 4G, 802.16, or any other suitable communication technology. The network **130** may use wireless, wired, or a combination of wireless and wired communication technologies. Examples of protocols used by the network **130** include transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP), hypertext transport protocol (HTTP), simple mail transfer protocol (SMTP), file transfer protocol (FTP), or any other suitable communication protocol.

Live Stream Module

(18) FIG. 2 depicts the live stream module **200** and its associated modules, in accordance with an embodiment. In this example embodiment, the live stream module **200** includes an anchor generation module **210**, a stream communication module **220**, an anchor analyzer module **230**, an anchor list **240**, a video on demand (VOD) generator module **250**, and a search module **260**. In some embodiments, the live stream module **200** has different modules and/or logical structures than the ones described herein, and the functions can be distributed among the modules and/or logical structures in a different manner than described here.

(19) The anchor generation module **210** generates one or more anchors to be associated with a live stream. Each anchor represents an opportune timestamp in the live stream for the viewer client

device **110** to access the live stream. For example, in a gaming stream, an anchor may be associated with a time point corresponding to the beginning of a new game. As another example, a creator may switch from a first subject to a second subject during a live stream.

(20) The anchor generation module **210** permits a creator to create an anchor through the graphical user interface **180** presented on the creator client device **108**. The creator can choose to place an anchor at the current timestamp of the ongoing live stream at his/her discretion. For example, the creator provides a user input (e.g. a click on a button or a drag and drop) on the graphical user interface. As another example, the creator may, at a later time, manually specify a timestamp occurring earlier in the live stream to generate an anchor. This is useful for a creator that may have forgotten to generate anchors in real-time. In response to a user input to generate an anchor in the live stream, the creator client device **108** sends an anchor generation request to the anchor generation module **210** which then proceeds to generate the anchor. In various embodiments, the anchor generation module **210** may provide notifications to viewer client devices **110** that are currently accessing the live stream when the new anchor is generated.

(21) Each anchor is associated with the live stream and specifies: 1) a timestamp within the duration of the live stream and 2) a validity duration. For example, the timestamp of the live stream corresponds to the time point in the live stream that coincided with when the creator provided the input to create the anchor. As another example, the timestamp corresponds to the time that is manually specified by the creator.

(22) The validity duration of an anchor describes a period of time that the anchor is valid for after being generated. Once the validity duration of an anchor expires, a viewer client device **110** can no longer access the live stream beginning at that anchor. In some embodiments, the validity duration of an anchor is predetermined by the anchor generation module **210**. In other embodiments, the validity duration of each anchor may be manually specified by the creator. For example, before the live stream begins, the anchor generation module **210** may prompt the creator to enter a default validity duration (e.g. 5 minutes) for each anchor that is to be generated during the live stream. Additionally, the anchor generation module **210** may prompt the creator to enter a validity duration for each generated anchor in real-time (e.g. immediately after the creator specifies the creation of an anchor).

(23) The generation of an anchor may also be performed automatically by the anchor generation module **210** without intervention from the creator. The anchor generation module **210** may implement a machine learning model that analyzes the preferences and/or characteristics of the creator to understand the likely position of an appropriate anchor. For example, a creator may be prone to a moment of silence that lasts beyond a threshold time as the creator contemplates what to say for the next subject matter. Therefore, the machine learning model may choose to embed an anchor in the live stream when a longer than threshold silence duration occurs in the stream. As another example, a creator may use a particular phrase that indicates that a new topic is starting (e.g. "Okay, shifting gears . . ."). The machine learning model may be specifically trained to recognize the tendencies or used phrases of the creator and generates anchors accordingly.

(24) Each generated anchor is stored in the anchor list **240**. The anchor list **240** may be a readable data file or database table that stores an associated stream, an identifier of the anchor (e.g. anchor 1, anchor 2, etc.), the timestamp, and the validity duration associated with each anchor.

(25) The stream communication module **220** receives the live stream from the creator client device **108** and is responsible for processing, storing and/or buffering, and transmitting the stream to one or more viewer client devices **100**. One example for processing the stream includes transcoding the live stream received from the creator client device **108**. For example, the video and audio may have been previously encoded by the creator client device **108**. The video may be in a H.264 format and the audio in an advanced audio coding (AAC) format. The stream communication module **220** may transcode the video to a different format, video resolution, and/or frame rate and transcode the audio to a different format or different bit rate. The transcoded video and audio are transmitted by

the stream communication module **220** to the viewer client device **110** according to standard protocols (e.g. real-time transport protocol (RTP), real-time messaging protocol (RTMP), user datagram protocol (UDP), transmission control protocol (TCP)).

(26) The stream communication module **220** handles communications with the various viewer client devices **110**. For example, the stream communication module **220** receives requests from various viewer client devices **110** to access the live stream and additionally provides the live stream beginning at a timestamp specified by a generated anchor. One type of request is a join request that originates from a viewer client device **110** that is newly accessing the live stream. Another type of request is a rejoin request from a viewer client device **110** that was previously accessing the live stream, temporarily exited, and is now attempting to rejoin the stream.

(27) In a use case where a join request is received, responsive to receiving the join request from a viewer client device **110**, the stream communication module **220** provides the timestamp associated with the join request to the anchor analyzer module **230**. The anchor analyzer module **230** selects an anchor from the anchor list **240** depending on the provided timestamp associated with the join request. Details regarding the analysis and selection of an anchor is described further below.

(28) The stream communication module **220** receives, from the anchor analyzer module **230**, an identified anchor from the anchor list. The identified anchor specifies a timestamp of the live stream from when the viewer client device **110** is to begin accessing the live stream. Therefore, the stream communication module **220** provides the live stream to the client device **110** beginning at the timestamp specified in the selected anchor.

(29) A use case where a rejoin request is received includes where the viewer client device **110** accesses the live stream, is diverted from the live stream to play a content item, and then attempts to rejoin the live stream upon finishing the content item. As an example, a content item is an advertisement that is intended to temporarily replace the live stream displayed on a viewer client device **110**. The advertisement can be a TrueView advertisement which allows a user to skip the advertisement after a threshold period of time (e.g. 5 seconds). Therefore, a user may finish with a content item by providing a user input (e.g. a click) to skip it after the threshold amount of time. When the content item finishes playing, the viewer client device **110** sends a rejoin request to the stream communication module **220**. Thus, the anchors of the live stream are advantageous as they enable the viewer client device **110** to rejoin the live stream at an opportune timestamp after having watched a content item.

(30) To enable the viewer client device **110** to appropriately depart the live stream and play the content item, the stream communication module **220** provides further instructions to the viewer client device **110** in addition to the content item. As one example, the instructions including encoding/decoding information of the content item such that the viewer client device **110** can adequately playback the video and audio data of the content item. As another example, the stream communication module **220** further delivers a departure time interval. The departure time interval represents a length of time that the viewer client device **110** can access the live stream before being diverted away from the live stream to the content item. Upon expiration of the departure time interval, the viewer client device **110** temporarily exits the live stream to display the content item. When the viewer client device **110** exits the live stream, it records a timestamp of the live stream that corresponds to when it exited (e.g. a departure timestamp).

(31) While the content item is temporarily played by the viewer client device **110** (i.e., coinciding with or after the departure timestamp), the anchor generation module **210** may generate additional anchors for the live stream. When the stream communication module **220** receives a rejoin request after the playing of the content item is terminated, the stream communication module **220** also receives the departure timestamp from the viewer client device **110**. The stream communication module **220** passes the received departure timestamp to the anchor analyzer module **230** such that an appropriate anchor can be identified given the rejoin request. When the stream communication module **220** receives the identified, appropriate anchor from the anchor analyzer module **230**, the

stream communication module **220** provides the live stream beginning at the timestamp specified by the appropriate anchor. Thus, the stream communication module **220** allows the viewer client device **110** to rejoin the live stream by providing the live stream beginning at the identified anchor. More generally, the implementation of the generated anchors allows the user of the viewer client device **110** to miss none or a very minimal amount of the live stream or rejoin at an appropriate anchor point when being diverted to watch a content item.

(32) The stream communication module **220** is capable of providing information to the viewer client device **110** indicating that the live stream is currently in a “semi-live” state. For example, the viewer client device **110** displays on the user interface **180**, to the viewing user, an indication of the semi-live state on a graphical user interface (GUI). The indication may be a colored button or indicator. Additionally, the viewer client device **110** may also present a selectable option on the GUI to the user. When the GUI receives a user input, the viewer client device **110** sends a request to the stream communication module **220** to access the live segment of the live stream. Thus, this provides the user of the viewer client device **110** the control in regards to watching the live stream in a live or semi-live state. In response to the request, the stream communication module **220** provides the live segment of the live stream to the viewer client device **110**. The viewer client device **110** can change the indication on the GUI to display a different indicator (e.g. a different color or a different button) such that the user can readily understand that the live stream is now in a live state.

(33) The anchor analyzer module **230** selects an appropriate anchor from the anchor list **240** such that the viewer client device **110** can join or rejoin the live stream at an opportune timestamp specified by the anchor. The anchor analyzer module **230** selects an anchor as the appropriate anchor based on the timestamp specified by the anchor, the validity duration specified by the anchor, and the timestamp associated with the join or rejoin request sent by the client device **110**. The anchor analyzer module **230** may default to a scenario where no anchor is selected. In this case, the anchor analyzer module **230** instructs the stream communication module **220** to provide the live stream to a viewer client device **110** at its current live moment as opposed to beginning at an anchor.

(34) The anchor analyzer module **230** identifies an appropriate anchor from an anchor list **240** through a process that is dependent on the type of request (e.g. a join or rejoin request) that was sent by the viewer client device **110**. For example, if the viewer client device **110** is newly joining the live stream (e.g. join request), the anchor analyzer module **230** retrieves an anchor list **240** that includes all generated anchors associated with the live stream. Alternatively, if the viewer client device is rejoining the live stream (e.g. rejoin request), the anchor analyzer module **230** retrieves an anchor list that only includes anchors that were generated while the content item was playing on the viewer client device **110**.

(35) Of the anchors in the retrieved anchor list **240**, the anchor analyzer module **230** determines which anchors remain valid based on the validity duration associated with each anchor. To do this, the anchor analyzer module **230** calculates the difference between the timestamp specified by the anchor and a timestamp associated with when the join or rejoin request was sent. The difference is compared to the validity duration associated with the identified anchor. If the difference falls below the validity duration, indicating that the anchor is valid, then the anchor analyzer module **230** tags the anchor as valid. Alternatively, if the difference between the current time and the timestamp specified by the identified anchor is above the validity duration, then the anchor is tagged as invalid. The invalid anchors are disregarded from further consideration whereas the valid anchors are further analyzed. In the scenario that all the anchors in the anchor list **240** are invalid, the anchor analyzer module **230** proceeds with the default case and instructs the stream communication module **220** to provide the live stream in the live state.

(36) Having identified the valid anchors, the anchor analyzer module **230** identifies an anchor depending on whether the viewer client device **110** has sent a join request or a rejoin request to the

stream communication module **220**. If the viewer client device **110** is newly joining the live stream, the anchor analyzer module **230** identifies and selects the most recent anchor in the anchor list **240**. The most recent anchor specifies a timestamp in the live stream that is more recent than timestamps specified by all other anchors in the anchor list **240**.

(37) If the viewer client device **110** is rejoining the live stream after having been temporarily diverted away (e.g. diverted to watch a content item), the anchor analyzer module **230** identifies when the viewer client device **110** exited the live stream (e.g. departure time). The departure time can be previously sent by the viewer client device **110** along with the rejoin request. The anchor analyzer module **230** selects the anchor with a timestamp that is nearest to the identified departure time. The timestamp of an anchor nearest to the identified departure time may occur prior to the identified departure time, meaning that upon rejoining the live stream at that anchor, the viewer client device **110** would replay a portion of the live stream. In this scenario, the viewer client device **110** avoids skipping over any portion of the live stream. Alternatively, the timestamp of an anchor nearest to the identified departure time may occur subsequent to the identified departure time. Therefore, the viewer client device **110** can rejoin the live stream at the opportune timestamp of the anchor while having missed very little of the live stream.

(38) Once the anchor analyzer module **230** has identified the appropriate anchor, the anchor analyzer module **230** instructs the stream communication module **220** to send the live stream to a viewer client device **110** beginning at the selected anchor.

(39) After a live stream is completed, the VOD generator module **250** obtains the stream and generates a video on demand (VOD) to be stored in the content store **120**. Thus, the viewer client device **110** can access the VOD at a subsequent time and display the live stream even though it is no longer live-streaming. In generating the VOD, the VOD generator module **250** associates the generated anchors that were originally created during the live stream with the VOD. For example, the VOD generator module **250** encodes the dropped anchors along with the stream. Additionally, the VOD generator module **250** creates an associated data file (or database table) that includes the timestamp specified by each anchor in the stream as well as a tag (e.g. descriptive keyword) that describes each anchor. For example, an anchor may indicate that the creator switched from talking about a topic of dogs to a topic of cats at a timestamp in the stream. Therefore, the data file may tag the anchor at the timestamp with the particular subject matter regarding cats. The data file may include more than one tag for each anchor.

(40) The search module **260** enables users of viewer client devices **110** to effectively search through VOD's for an anchor that is of interest. Therefore, the search module **260** provides improved search granularity a viewer client device **110** can access specific anchors within a VOD instead of having to access the VOD from the beginning. For example, the search module **260** receives a search query and parses the query for keywords. The search module **260** searches the content store **120** for an anchor in a VOD that matches the query or a keyword in the query. For example, if a query from a client device searches for "puppies," the search module **260** searches the metadata file associated with each VOD to identify anchors that are tagged with the subject matter of "puppy" or "puppies." The match may be a text string match between the search query and the keyword associated with the anchor. The search module **260** returns the search result of anchors that are tagged with the matching subject matter to the viewer client device **110** that sent the query. If a user of the viewer client device **110** selects an anchor, indicating that he/she is interested in watching a VOD starting at that anchor, the search module **260** retrieves, from the content store **120**, the appropriate video segment in the VOD beginning at that anchor and provides it to the viewer client device **110**. This enables a user to view relevant clips of a VOD file as opposed to having to view the entire VOD that may not be entirely relevant to the provided query.

Software Module

(41) FIG. 3A depicts the software module **300A** on the creator client device **108** and its associated modules, in accordance with one embodiment. The software module **300A** includes a stream

generator module **305** and a stream processing module **310**.

(42) The stream generator module **305** generates the video and audio of the stream obtained from a hardware (e.g., a camera) or software (e.g., a video game) source communicatively coupled to, a part of, or operating on the viewer client device **110**. The generated stream is stored in the stream store **315**. The stream generator module **305** sets the characteristics of the live stream including the video resolution, video frame rate, and audio bit rate. Alternatively, the characteristics of the live stream can be set by the creator to provide the optimal live-stream viewing experience for his/her viewers.

(43) The stream generator module **305** passes along portions of the live-stream as they are captured to the stream processing module **310**. Therefore, the stream processing module **310** can process and transmit the stream while the stream generator module **305** continues to record new portions of the live stream. The stream processing module **310** encodes the video and audio according to characteristics (e.g. resolution, frame rate, bit rate) of the video and audio. As an example, the video is encoded using a H.264 encoder while the audio is separately encoded using an AAC encoder. Once encoded, the stream processing module **310** proceeds to transmit the encoded video and audio to the stream hosting server **150**.

(44) The stream processing module **310** uses standard protocols (e.g. RTP, RTMP, UDP, TCP) to transmit the encoded video and audio of the live-stream to the stream hosting server **150**. For example, RTP over UDP is preferred for a live stream to ensure that the viewers can watch the stream with limited delay.

(45) FIG. 3B depicts the software module **300B** on the viewer client device **110** and its associated modules, in accordance with one embodiment. The software module enables the viewer client device **110** to access the live stream. In various embodiments, the software module **300** includes a user interface manager **350**, a request module **355**, and a play back module **365**. In some embodiments, the software module **300A/300B** of either the creator client device **108** or the viewer client device **110** has different modules and/or logical structures than the ones described herein, and the functions can be distributed among the modules and/or logical structures in a different manner than described here.

(46) The user interface manager **350** receives from and provides information through the user interface **180** to the user of the client device **110**. For example, the client device may be a mobile client device (e.g. cell phone) with a touch display interface. Therefore, the user interface manager **350** receives touch inputs and also displays the live stream for viewing through the user interface **180**. The user interface manager **350** may provide information during the live stream. As previously mentioned, the user interface manager **350** provides a GUI on the user interface **180** of the viewer client device **110**. The GUI may provide an indication (e.g. a yellow button) that current stream is in a semi-live state as opposed to a live state (e.g. a green button). As another example, the user interface manager **350** may provide notifications whenever a new anchor has been generated in the live stream.

(47) The user interface manager **350** presents VOD with anchors to the viewer client device **110**. In displaying a VOD, the user interface manager **350** may present, through the user interface **180**, additional selectable options. For example, selectable options may be forward or back arrows displayed on the user interface **180**. When a user input is received on the forward arrow, the user interface manager **350** identifies the subsequent anchor (e.g. anchor specifying the next timestamp in the VOD) and displays the VOD at that anchor. Similarly, if a user input is received on a back arrow, the user interface manager **350** identifies the previous anchor (e.g. anchor specifying the previous timestamp in the VOD) and displays the VOD at the previous anchor.

(48) The user interface manager **350** may maintain a counter that tracks the number of times that users start or skip from an anchor in a VOD. The counter represents the popularity of the anchor in the VOD. The updated counter information may be provided to the stream hosting server **150** to further improve search functionality. For example, viewer client devices **110** may transmit a search

for the term “puppies” and then subsequently receive a particular anchor in a VOD that is associated with “puppies.” If the majority of viewer client devices **110** that had provided the “puppies” search query end up displaying the VOD starting at the anchor (e.g. not skipping the anchor), that information may be provided back to the stream hosting server **150**. Alternatively, if a majority of viewer client devices **110** that had provided the “puppies” search query briefly display the VOD starting at the anchor, but quickly stop watching, the keyword of “puppies” may be a poor topic association with the anchor. The stream hosting server **150** can use the information to adjust the keyword labels that are associated with the anchor and further update ranking algorithms for running search queries that identify anchors in the VOD content.

(49) The user interface manager **350** recognizes when the viewer client device **110** is displaying the VOD and when the viewer client device **110** stops displaying the VOD. At a subsequent time, if the viewer client device **110** is instructed to begin displaying the VOD again, the viewer client device **110** can begin displaying at a relevant point of the VOD specified by the anchor. In an example scenario, the user interface manager **350** may present the VOD on a webpage and the user decides to scroll up or down on the webpage such that the VOD is no longer in view. Thus, the user interface manager **350** records a timestamp that indicates when the viewer client device **110** stopped displaying the VOD. The VOD will stop playing if the VOD is no longer in view. At a subsequent time, the user may scroll back to the VOD. Therefore, the user interface manager **350** receives an indication that the viewer client device **110** is continuing to display the VOD. The user interface manager **350** may begin playing the VOD at the nearest anchor which may be either before or after the timestamp that indicated when the viewer client device **110** stopped displaying the VOD.

(50) The user interface manager **350** receives an input indicating that the user would like to access a live stream. The user interface manager **350** provides this input to the request module **355**. The request module **355** is configured to provide a variety of different requests from the viewer client device **110** to the stream hosting server **150**. As a first example, in response to receiving the user input from the user interface manager **350**, the request module **355** sends a join or rejoin request (depending on whether the user is newly joining or rejoining) to the stream hosting server **150**. In a second example, the request module **355** can send user queries to the stream hosting server **150** to search through anchors of VODs that may be relevant to the user query. Each of these examples are described further below.

(51) Referring to the first example, when a viewer client device **110** desires to access the live stream, the request module **355** determines whether to send a join request or a rejoin request. For example, if the viewer client device **110** is newly accessing the live stream, then the request module **355** chooses to send a join request. If the viewer client device **110** had previously accessed the live stream and was temporarily diverted away (e.g. 1-5 minutes), the request module **355** chooses to send a rejoin request. In some cases, the request module **355** chooses to send a join request as opposed to a rejoin request even if the viewer client has previously accessed the stream. For example, the request module **355** determines that the viewer client device had previously accessed the live stream, but exited the stream over a threshold amount of time ago (e.g. 30 minutes, 1 hour). Therefore, the request module **355** treats this viewer client device **110** as a new join request.

(52) The request module **355** may send a rejoin request to the stream hosting server **150** along with a timestamp retrieved from the timestamp store **370**. The included timestamp is helpful for the stream hosting server **150** to determine when the viewer client device **110** previously left the live stream. For example, a viewer client device **110** may be previously accessing the live stream and was subsequently diverted to watch a content item at a departure timestamp of the live stream. Therefore, when the viewer client device **110** attempts to rejoin the stream, the request module **355** sends the departure time along with the rejoin request to the stream hosting server **150**. The stream hosting server **150** determines the anchors that were generated while the client device **110** was playing the content item based on the departure time.

(53) Referring now to a second example, the request module **355** also handles submitted user queries to search through VODs for anchors that are associated with a particular topic of interest. The request module **355** transmits the search request to the search module **260** of the stream hosting server **150**. For example, the request module **355** may send a search request for “puppies.” In return, the viewer client device **110** receives a list of anchors that are associated with the subject matter of “puppies.” The list of anchors may be presented in an ordered ranked according to a search algorithm utilized by the search module **260**. Therefore, a user can select and play a VOD from an anchor that pertains to the particular topic of interest included in the search query.

(54) In some embodiments, the software module **300B** of the viewer client device **110** further includes the anchor analyzer module **230** and is responsible for identifying the appropriate anchor to begin accessing the live stream. Therefore, instead of the anchor analyzer module **230** being a module of the stream hosting server **150**, this embodiment includes the anchor analyzer module **230** in the viewer client device **110**.

(55) The anchor analyzer module **230** on the viewer client device **110** receives the anchor list **240** from the stream hosting server **150**. As one example, the anchor analyzer module **230** automatically identifies the appropriate anchor based on the timestamp of each anchor in the anchor list **240** and the timestamp associated with the join or rejoin request. As described previously, if the request is a join request, the anchor analyzer module **230** selects the anchor that specifies the most recent timestamp. If the request is a rejoin request, the anchor analyzer module **230** selects the anchor that specifies a timestamp that is nearest to the departure time.

(56) As a second example, the anchor analyzer module **230** may ask a user of the viewer client device **110** for a user input in identifying the appropriate anchor. The anchor analyzer module **230** presents the anchors in the anchor list **240** on the user interface **180** of the viewer client device **110** and receives a user input specifying the appropriate anchor to join or rejoin the stream at. In this example, the anchor analyzer module **230** provides the user with the final control over where to begin watching in the live stream.

(57) The playback module **365** receives, from the stream hosting server **150**, the live stream to be played on the viewer client device **110** based on the identified anchor. The live stream may contain additional instructions in a metadata file as to how the playback module **365** is to play the live stream (e.g. decoder, video resolution, and audio bitrate). For example, the playback module **365** may receive the live stream and associated audio files and may decode them separately before playing them on the user interface manager **350** of the viewer client device **110**.

(58) The playback module **365** also receives content items from the stream hosting server **150** to be played on the client device **110**. The content items may be stored in the client content store **375**. Additionally, the content item may have associated instructions (e.g. stored in a metadata file associated with the content item) that instruct the client device **110** to play the content item at a departure timestamp of the live stream. Thus, the client device **110** automatically diverts to playing the content item at the departure timestamp. This departure timestamp may be stored in the timestamp store **370** and used for further analysis by the anchor analyzer module **360** when the client device **110** is to rejoin the live stream.

Providing a Live Stream

(59) FIG. 4 depicts an example flow chart of the stream hosting server **150** providing a live stream to be played on a client device **110** based on a generated anchor, in accordance with an embodiment. The stream hosting server **150** receives **405** a live stream from a creator client device **108**. The stream hosting server **150** receives **410** a request to generate an anchor from the creator client device **108** at a timestamp of the live stream.

(60) The stream hosting server **150** generates **415** anchors while the live stream is ongoing. As described above, each anchor is generated with a timestamp and a validity duration. The stream hosting server **150** receives **420** a request (e.g. join request or rejoin request) from a client device and determines **425** anchors that are valid based on the validity duration associated with each

anchor. From the list of anchors that are valid, the stream hosting server **150** identifies **430** an anchor. For example, if the received request was a join request, the stream hosting server **150** identifies the anchor that specifies the most recent timestamp. If the received request was a rejoin request, the stream hosting server **150** identifies the anchor that specifies a timestamp closest to the departure timestamp. Once the stream hosting server **150** has identified the anchor, the stream hosting server **150** provides **435** the live stream to the viewer client device **110** for playback beginning at the timestamp specified by the identified anchor.

Requesting and Playback of a Live Stream

(61) FIG. **5** depicts an example flow chart of playing back, by a viewer client device **110**, a received live stream based on a generated anchor, in accordance with an embodiment. A viewer client device **110** receives **505** user input specifying a desire to access a live stream. For example, a user may provide a touch input through the user interface **180**. The viewer client device **110** determines **510** the type of request to send on behalf of the user. For example, the viewer client device **110** determines whether the viewer client device **110** is newly accessing the live stream or if it is returning to the live stream after having been diverted. Thus, the request may be a join request or a rejoin request. The viewer client device sends **515** the request to access a live stream to the stream hosting server **150**. If the viewer client device **110** is sending a rejoin request, the request further includes a departure timestamp associated with the viewer client device **110** previously departed the live stream.

(62) The viewer client device **110** receives **520** the live stream along with an identified anchor that specifies a timestamp of the live stream. If the viewer client device **110** is newly joining the live stream, the identified anchor is the most recently generated anchor associated with the live stream. If the viewer client device **110** is rejoining the live stream, the identified anchor specifies a timestamp that is nearest to the departure time corresponding to when the viewer client device **110** departed the live stream. The viewer client device **110** plays back **545** the live stream for the user beginning at the timestamp specified by the identified anchor.

General

(63) The foregoing description of the embodiments of the invention has been presented for the purpose of illustration; it is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Persons skilled in the relevant art can appreciate that many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above disclosure.

(64) Some portions of this description describe the embodiments of the invention in terms of algorithms and symbolic representations of operations on information. These algorithmic descriptions and representations are commonly used by those skilled in the data processing arts to convey the substance of their work effectively to others skilled in the art. These operations, while described functionally, computationally, or logically, are understood to be implemented by computer programs or equivalent electrical circuits, microcode, or the like. Furthermore, it has also proven convenient at times, to refer to these arrangements of operations as modules, without loss of generality. The described operations and their associated modules may be embodied in software, firmware, hardware, or any combinations thereof. In one embodiment, a software module is implemented with a computer program product comprising a computer-readable medium containing computer program code, which can be executed by a computer processor for performing any or all of the steps, operations, or processes described.

(65) Embodiments of the invention may also relate to an apparatus for performing the operations herein. This apparatus may be specially constructed for the required purposes, and/or it may comprise a general-purpose computing device selectively activated or reconfigured by a computer program stored in the computer. Such a computer program may be stored in a non-transitory, tangible computer readable storage medium, or any type of media suitable for storing electronic instructions, which may be coupled to a computer system bus. Furthermore, any computing systems referred to in the specification may include a single processor or may be architectures

employing multiple processor designs for increased computing capability.

(66) Embodiments of the invention may also relate to a product that is produced by a computing process described herein. Such a product may comprise information resulting from a computing process, where the information is stored on a non-transitory, tangible computer readable storage medium and may include any embodiment of a computer program product or other data combination described herein.

(67) Finally, the language used in the specification has been principally selected for readability and instructional purposes, and it may not have been selected to delineate or circumscribe the inventive subject matter. It is therefore intended that the scope of the invention be limited not by this detailed description, but rather by any claims that issue on an application based hereon. Accordingly, the disclosure of the embodiments of the invention is intended to be illustrative, but not limiting, of the scope of the invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

Claims

1. A computer-implemented method comprising: receiving, by an application on a viewer client device, a user input to access a live stream; sending, by the application on the viewer client device, a request to access the live stream; presenting, by the application on the viewer client device, information allowing a user to indicate a first anchor of a plurality of anchors of the live stream, the first anchor corresponding to a timestamp for starting a portion of the live stream; receiving user input identifying the live stream and user input indicating the first anchor of the live stream; and displaying, by the application on the viewer client device, the live stream beginning at the timestamp corresponding to the first anchor of the live stream.
2. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is one of a join request or a rejoin request based on whether the viewer client device previously accessed the live stream over a threshold amount of time.
3. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a join request, and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp of the live stream that is nearest to a timestamp associated with the join request to access the live stream.
4. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, further comprising: receiving a content item to be presented to a user on the viewer client device; identifying a departure time interval of the live stream associated with the content item; displaying the received content item in place of the live stream responsive to expiration of the departure time interval; and storing a departure timestamp of the live stream corresponding to when the received content item was displayed in place of the live stream.
5. The computer-implemented method of claim 4, wherein the request to access the live stream is a rejoin request and is sent responsive to having finished displaying the received content item to the user.
6. The computer-implemented method of claim 4, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a rejoin request, and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp nearest to the departure timestamp of the live stream.
7. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 further comprising: providing an indication that the live stream is currently in a semi-live state; and providing a selectable indication that, when selected, transitions the live stream in the semi-live state to a live segment of the live stream.
8. A non-transitory computer-readable medium comprising instructions, which when executed by a processor of a viewer client device, causes the processor to perform operations comprising: receiving, by an application on the viewer client device, a user input to access a live stream; sending, by the application on the viewer client device, a request to access the live stream; presenting, by the application on the viewer client device, information allowing a user to indicate a first anchor of a plurality of anchors of the live stream, the first anchor corresponding to a

timestamp for starting a portion of the live stream; receiving user input identifying the live stream and user input indicating the first anchor of the live stream; and displaying, by the application on the viewer client device, the live stream beginning at the timestamp corresponding to the first anchor of the live stream.

9. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 8, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is one of a join request or a rejoin request based on whether the viewer client device previously accessed the live stream over a threshold amount of time.

10. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 8, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a join request, and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp of the live stream that is nearest to a timestamp associated with the join request to access the live stream.

11. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 8, the operations further comprising: receiving a content item to be presented to a user on the viewer client device; identifying a departure time interval of the live stream associated with the content item; displaying the received content item in place of the live stream responsive to expiration of the departure time interval; and storing a departure timestamp of the live stream corresponding to when the received content item was displayed in place of the live stream.

12. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 11, wherein the request to access the live stream is a rejoin request and is sent responsive to having finished displaying the received content item to the user.

13. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 11, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a rejoin request, and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp nearest to the departure timestamp of the live stream.

14. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 11, the operations further comprising: providing an indication that the live stream is currently in a semi-live state; and providing a selectable indication that, when selected, transitions the live stream in the semi-live state to a live segment of the live stream.

15. A system comprising: a memory; and a processor, coupled to the memory, to perform operations comprising: receiving, by an application on a viewer client device, a user input to access a live stream; sending, by the application on the viewer client device, a request to access the live stream; presenting, by the application on the viewer client device, information allowing a user to indicate a first anchor of a plurality of anchors of the live stream, the first anchor corresponding to a timestamp for starting a portion of the live stream; receiving user input identifying the live stream and user input indicating the first anchor of the live stream; and displaying, by the application on the viewer client device, the live stream beginning at the timestamp corresponding to the first anchor of the live stream.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is one of a join request or a rejoin request based on whether the viewer client device previously accessed the live stream over a threshold amount of time.

17. The system of claim 15, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a join request, and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp of the live stream that is nearest to a timestamp associated with the join request to access the live stream.

18. The system of claim 15, the operations further comprising: receiving a content item to be presented to a user on the viewer client device; identifying a departure time interval of the live stream associated with the content item; displaying the received content item in place of the live stream responsive to expiration of the departure time interval; and storing a departure timestamp of the live stream corresponding to when the received content item was displayed in place of the live stream.

19. The system of claim 18, wherein the request to access the live stream is a rejoin request and is sent responsive to having finished displaying the received content item to the user.

20. The system of claim 18, wherein the sent request to access the live stream is a rejoin request,

and wherein the first anchor corresponds to a timestamp nearest to the departure timestamp of the live stream.
