

Iraqi women boxers aim sucker punch at gender taboos

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-06 23:34

NAJAF: Iraqi boxer Bushra Al-Hajjar jumps into the ring, gloves raised to eye level, and strikes out at her sparring partner.

Her bigger struggle, though, is to deliver a blow against social taboos.

In Iraq's Shiite city of Najaf, the sight of a women's boxing hall is unusual but, like others here, the 35-year-old boxing instructor is fighting deeply ingrained taboos.

"At home, I have a full training room, with mats and a punching bag," said the mother of two, who also practices karate.

Hajjar won gold in the 70 kilogram-class at a boxing tournament in the capital Baghdad in December.

"My family and friends are very supportive, they're very happy with the level I've reached," she said, a blue headscarf pulled tightly over her hair.

Twice a week, she trains at a private university in Najaf, 100 km south of Baghdad, where she also teaches sports.

In overwhelmingly conservative Iraq, and particularly in Najaf, Hajjar acknowledges her adventure has raised eyebrows.

"We've come across many difficulties," she said. "We're a conservative society that has difficulty accepting these kinds of things."

She recalls the protests when training facilities first opened for women, but said "today, there are many halls."

Boxing student Ola Mustafa, 16, taking a break from her punching bag, said: "We live in a macho society that opposes success for women."

However, she said she has the support not only of her trainer but also of her parents and brother, signaling that social change is afoot.

"People are gradually beginning to accept it," she said. "If more girls try it out, society will automatically come to accept it."

Iraqi boxing federation president Ali Taklif acknowledges that Iraqi women engaging in the sport is a "recent phenomenon," but says it is gaining ground. "There is a lot of demand from females wanting to join," he said, adding that Iraq now has some 20 women's boxing clubs.

More than 100 women boxers competed in a December tournament, in all

categories, he added.

But “like other sports (in Iraq), the discipline suffers from a lack of infrastructure, training facilities and equipment.”

In the past, Iraq had a proud tradition of women in sports, especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

Whether in basketball, volleyball or cycling, women’s teams regularly took part in regional tournaments.

But sanctions, decades of conflict and a hardening of conservative social values brought this era to a close, with only the autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq largely spared.

There has been a timid reversal in recent years, with women taking up a range of sports, also including kickboxing. For Hajjer Ghazi, who at age 13 won a silver medal in December, boxing runs in the family.

Her father, a veteran professional boxer, encouraged his children to follow in his footsteps.

Both her sisters and older brother Ali are also boxers.

“Our father supports us more than the state does,” said Ali in their hometown of Amara in southwestern Iraq.

The father, Hassanein Ghazi, a 55-year-old truck driver who won several medals in his heyday, insists: “Women have the right to play sports, it’s only normal.”

He recognizes certain “sensitivities” remain, linked to traditional tribal values.

As an example, he pointed out that “when their coach wants them to run, he takes them to the outskirts of town,” away from too many onlookers.



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Victims turned activists: Iraqi women battle abuse
Pandemic restrictions a business boon for some Iraqi women

[Algeria's ambassador returns to Paris after 3-month dispute](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-06 23:25

ALGIERS: Algeria's ambassador returned to Paris on Thursday, three months after being recalled amid tensions related to the era of French colonial rule in the North African country. The move was announced by Algeria's presidency.

In October, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune recalled Ambassador Antar Daoud, citing alleged "irresponsible comments" by French President Emmanuel Macron about Algeria's pre-colonial history and post-colonial system of government.

Algeria also refused permission for France to fly military planes in its airspace, and accused Paris of "genocide" during the colonial era.

Last month, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian sought to defuse tension by paying a visit to Algiers. The countries agreed to resume cooperation toward peace in Libya and on other international issues.

At the time, Le Drian noted the countries' "complex history" and said he wanted to "remove misunderstandings."

Algeria gained independence after a brutal six-year war from 1954 to 1962, following more than a century under French colonial rule.

The countries in recent years have had close economic and cultural ties, but relations took a sharp turn for the worse after France sharply curtailed visas for people from North Africa because governments there were refusing to take back migrants refused asylum in France.



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Algeria drops 'protest' case against teenage girl
Algerian ambassador to return to Paris on Jan. 6

Arab world mourns demise of BlackBerry, now consigned to tech history's scrap heap

Thu, 2022-01-06 21:50

LONDON: It was the world's first smartphone. Now, barely two decades after it revolutionized the way humans communicated, Arabs have joined the rest of the world to bid a fond farewell to BlackBerry as the firm switches off life support for its classic, pre-Android ground-breaker – once the must-have device for go-getters everywhere.

The story of the rise and inevitable fall of the BlackBerry is a parable for our fast-moving, rapidly evolving technological age. Keeping pace with innovations that come and go faster than the seasons is a challenge for consumers and manufacturers alike.

“First-mover advantage,” or the benefit of being first to the market with a new category of product, used to give pioneering technology companies a decisive head start over the competition, but no more.

In its day, for example, the Canadian firm BlackBerry seemed to have carved out an unassailable niche for itself – yet within a few years had been overtaken by the myriad smartphone rivals that followed in its pioneering wake, constantly adapting and improving upon its revolutionary concept.



A Saudi Arabian man checks his BlackBerry at a store in Jeddah in August

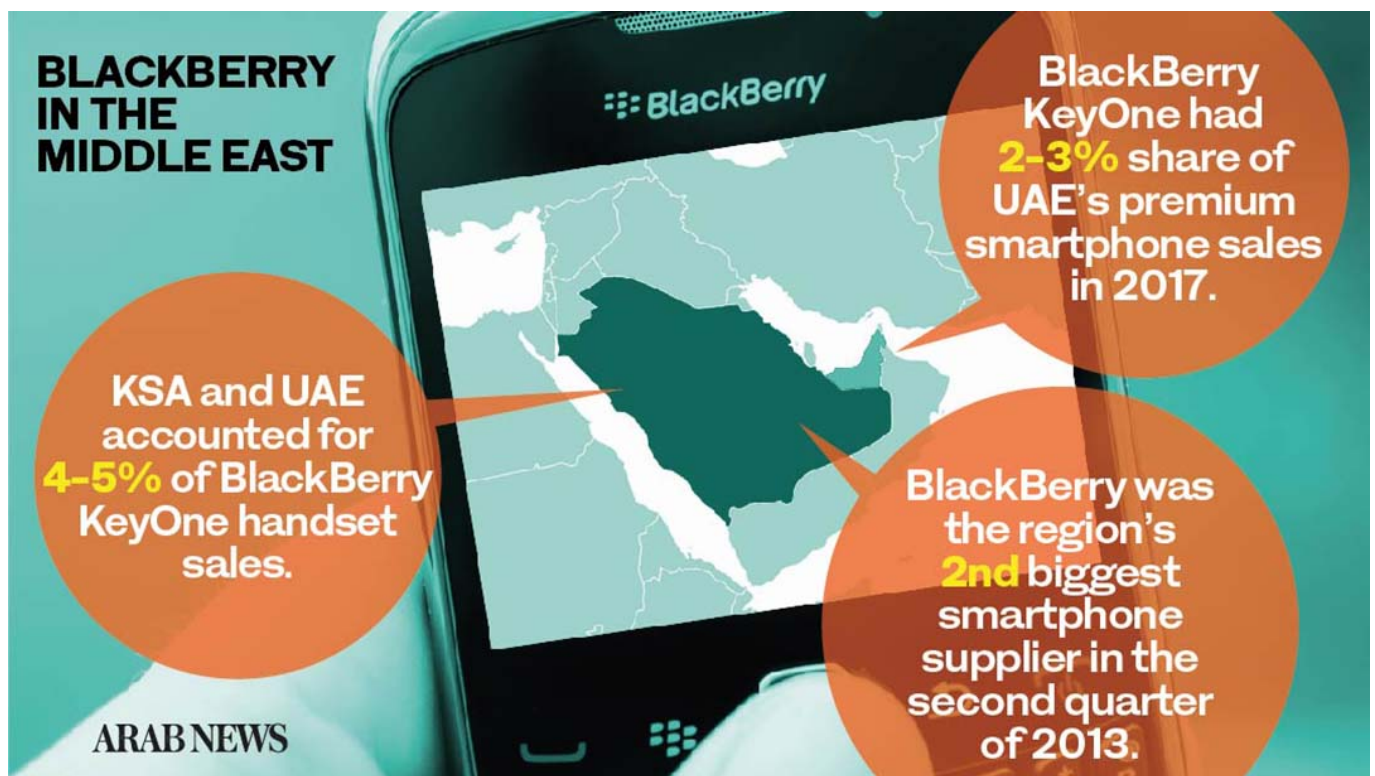
2010. (AFP/File Photo)

BlackBerry had itself been such a giant killer. One of its first products, launched in 1999, rendered the one-way pager redundant overnight, through the simple but inspired innovation of allowing users to reply to the messages they received.

The feature was introduced in a device called the RIM 850. RIM stood for Research in Motion, the name of the company behind the BlackBerry until 2013, when it finally adopted the name of its best-known product. The RIM 850 also featured an early version of the distinctive BlackBerry QWERTY keyboard.

The BlackBerry brand was introduced soon after. The name was not, as some believe, a clever riposte to the Apple brand. Rather, some bright spark at a marketing firm suggested it on the basis that the device's unique keyboard resembled the surface of a blackberry.

Holding the device in two hands and using only their thumbs to type, users quickly became adept at rapidly tapping out emails and messages on the tiny keys. For many, the BlackBerry became an addiction; not for nothing was the device nicknamed CrackBerry. Doctors began to identify cases of "BlackBerry thumb," a form of tendonitis caused by the constant use of the least dexterous part of the hand in a way that nature never intended.



The big breakthrough for the brand came in 2003 with the launch of the BlackBerry 7230, the world's first true smartphone. On a device no bigger than a Wall Street wallet, users could make calls, send and receive text messages and emails, and surf the internet.

It was an instant hit and, for a few years, an iconic status symbol. For a time, the BlackBerry was omnipresent in the well-manicured hands of high-

profile users such as Kim Kardashian, Sarah Jessica Parker and Barack Obama.

It was not to last, however. The launch of the Apple iPhone in 2007, and in particular its touchscreen, marked the end of the brief but glorious reign of the BlackBerry. For a while, arguments continued to rage between tech commentators about which device was best – but consumers settled the debate by voting with their credit cards.

Confronted by Apple’s slick touchscreen technology, the once-innovative BlackBerry keyboard suddenly seemed like a waste of precious screen space – something that Apple co-founder Steve Jobs was quick to point out.



Arabs join the rest of the world to bid a fond farewell to BlackBerry as the firm switches off life support for its classic, pre-Android ground-breaker.
(AFP/File Photo)

BlackBerry responded by doing what many technology innovators do – it turned its nose up at the upstart new kid on the block, having failed to learn the painful lessons provided by similar experiences of the likes of IBM and Xerox.

When BlackBerry was put up for sale in 2013, Time magazine concluded that the company had “failed to realize that smartphones would evolve beyond mere communication devices to become full-fledged mobile entertainment hubs.”

By the time BlackBerry woke up to this reality and scrambled to update its suddenly clunky products, they had been swept aside by the relentless stream of new products from Apple, which released a new and improved iPhone every

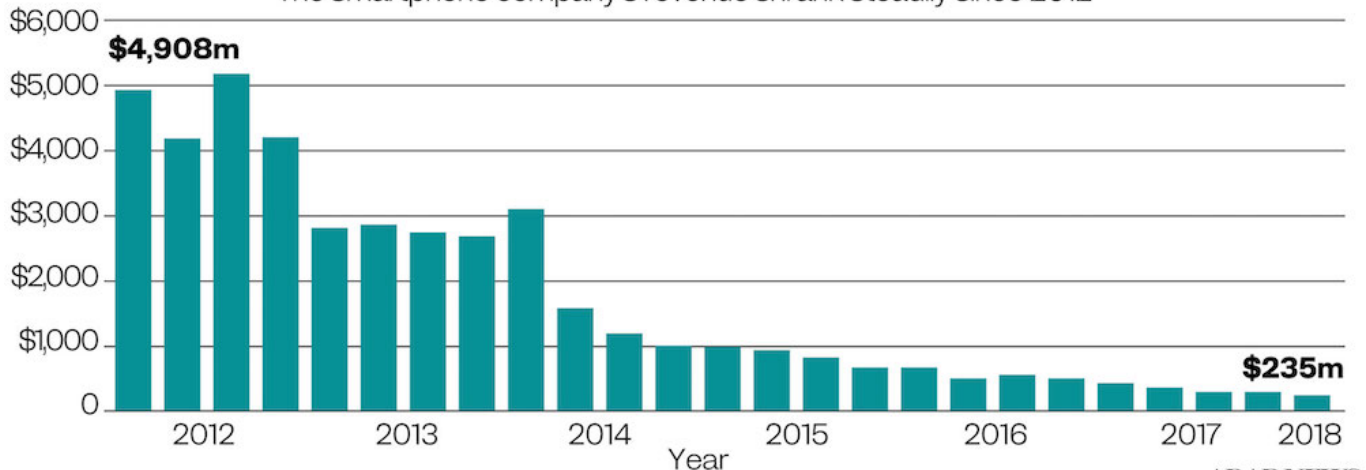
year.

In 2008, BlackBerry was worth \$80 billion. Five years later, its market value had plummeted to little more than \$4.3 billion. Its market share in the US collapsed from 70 percent to a mere 5 percent.

On Dec. 22, 2021, the company finally gave up the ghost and announced support for its legacy products was at an end.

HOW BLACKBERRY'S BUSINESS DECLINED

The smartphone company's revenue shrank steadily since 2012



Source: BlackBerry, Statista

ARAB NEWS

In fact, BlackBerry had already moved on from phones, reinventing itself in 2016 as a business “providing intelligent security software and services to enterprises and governments around the world.”

Spectacular although the demise of BlackBerry's smartphone business undoubtedly was, there is nothing unique about the firework-like trajectory of its rise and fall. Like so many other technologies, before and since, it was simply overtaken by others that did the same job, better.

Fax machines, Polaroid instant cameras, video cassette recorders, pagers, the Sony Walkman and CDs – the unique selling points of all these devices were replicated, improved upon and now have been subsumed into the convergence of the multiple technologies found within modern smartphones.

Each one of these now obsolete technologies continue to hold a place in the hearts of millions of people as milestones on their journeys through life. But taken together, they also mark the course of the rapid and remarkable evolution of human ingenuity and technology – and, perhaps, offer some valuable lessons that will inspire the hi-tech pioneers of tomorrow.

In reality, most of these technologies that seemed so revolutionary at the time they emerged were merely evolutionary. The fax replaced the telegram. Videotape replaced film. CDs replaced vinyl and cassette tapes. And so the list goes on.

As technology guru Joseph Awe once put it: “If you can buy it, it's already obsolete.”



For a time, the BlackBerry was omnipresent in the well-manicured hands of high-profile users such as Barack Obama and Kim Kardashian. (AFP/File Photos)

The trick for a successful manufacturer is to make its own products obsolete by updating them itself, rather than waiting for someone else to do it.

Even as consumers scrambled to get their hands on Apple's iPhone 13 Pro Max, launched in September last year, Apple already had a note in the diary about the launch of the next iteration of its world-beater later this year.

If the industry rumor mill is anything to go by, however, there is unlikely to be anything earth-shaking about the iPhone 14, just more tinkering around the edges. Nevertheless, doubtless we will snap it up.

In the 14 years since the iPhone debuted, there have been no fewer than 33 versions of the device. And the more we want one, the more we are prepared to pay for one. The first iPhone cost \$499; the iPhone 13 Pro Max starts at \$1,000.

It is hard to see where the smartphone can possibly go from here, beyond the endless incremental upgrades to screens, memory and cameras. What, then, will be the next big thing in technology?

Right now, some of the most exciting developments are taking place in the fields of artificial intelligence, big data, machine learning, voice technology, cloud computing and the internet of things.



Jim Balsillie, co-chief executive officer of Research In Motion (RIM) – poses with a huge replica of a BlackBerry Bold phone during the launch in Mumbai on September 18, 2008. (AFP/File Photo)

Follow the money trail left by the smartphone and it seems a fair bet that another grand convergence is approaching fast somewhere down the track. Implants, anyone?

If you think Alexa and your Ring video doorbell are smart, wait until all your possessions, physical and digital, are seamlessly connected via the cloud – and, crucially, enabled with personal agency.

Amazon's reportedly imminent smart fridge, which will order groceries for you when they start to run low, is just the start of the cool things to come.

And you did not really think that Google has given up on its Glass smart spectacles, with their heads-up display, did you? Since the device flopped with consumers in 2015 the company has been quietly developing the technology, which is now in proven use in a variety of industries.

Will any of this change the world or our lives for the better, as technology companies like to suggest? Probably not. What it will do is give data-hoovering corporations everywhere the ability to stare ever more directly and deeply into our souls, and sell us all those things we never even knew we needed.



In 2008, BlackBerry was worth \$80 billion. Five years later, its market value had plummeted to little more than \$4.3 billion. (AFP/File Photo)

Today, most of us seem happy with that deal – content to sign off on all those boring terms and conditions that absolutely nobody bothers to read reads in their rush to get their hands on the latest must-have innovation.

And, to be fair, the human race has been “must-having” since the dawn of time.

One of the oldest technologies is the hand ax, a crude stone tool developed between 1.6 and 2 million years ago. This technological breakthrough was arguably the most important ever made, for the simple reason that it began to make possible all the smart stuff we have produced since then.

With an ax, our ancestors could chop branches from trees, making it easier and quicker to build permanent shelters. This was a precursor to the development of settled societies and, ultimately, the first cities, the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals.

Most importantly, perhaps, it also allowed early humans to easily extract marrow from the bones of large animals, introducing a nutrition-rich diet that over time helped them develop more powerful brains – brains that would, ultimately, create the BlackBerry.



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The birth of the iPhoneBlackBerry sues Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram over patent infringement

[UAE announces 2022-2023 commitments on first day at UN Security Council](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-06 01:48

LONDON: The UAE on Wednesday announced its commitments for its second term on the UN Security Council for the next two years, a day after it formally took up the post as a non-permanent member of the world body.

The UAE's Stronger United commitments include working toward securing peace, advancing inclusion, building resilience, and spurring innovation, and will

guide the UAE's engagement with the Security Council and UN member states throughout its term, Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported. The UAE, along with Albania, Brazil, Gabon and Ghana, was elected by the UN General Assembly in June to serve as non-permanent members of the 15-member council for the 2022-2023 term. "The UAE's conduct on the UN Security Council will reflect who we are as a country and a people – tolerant, inclusive, and bound by the belief that we are stronger united," said Lana Nusseibeh, the Emirates' permanent representative to the UN.

ICYMI: Watch Amb Nusseibeh speak at today's flag installation ceremony for the newly elected members of the [@UN](#) Security Council.

We look forward to collaborating with towards a more peaceful & secure world where everyone can thrive. [#UAExUNSC](#) pic.twitter.com/UfdwYqS1hJ

– UAE Mission to the UN (@UAEMissionToUN) [January 5, 2022](#)

"Diplomacy is about dialogue, seeking out diverse views, and charting a path toward consensus," she said, adding: "We will seek a convergence of views and a unified council voice so that its decisions are met with the broadest possible support."

Nusseibeh said she is looking forward to working with the council and the wider UN membership "to build bridges, strengthen multilateralism, and deliver on the council's mandate."

The UAE will represent Arab countries at the Security Council and its commitment also includes strengthening cooperation with regional organizations, such as the Arab League and the African Union.

"The UAE has also promised to champion cross-cutting issues on the Security Council, including women, peace and security, climate change, and the use of technology to promote peace (and) will also address a range of other issues including counterterrorism and COVID-19 response and recovery," the statement said.

During its two-year term, the UAE will serve as president of the Security Council twice, in March and June next year, where it will set the agenda and chair its standing committees.



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[Lana Nusseibeh](#)

Egypt, UAE discuss bilateral ties, regional developmentsUN says 'following with concern' Houthi seizure of UAE-flagged ship, urges restraint

[Yemen condemns Houthi burning of dozens of homes in Hodeidah](#)

Wed, 2022-01-05 21:11

LONDON: The Yemeni government on Wednesday strongly condemned and denounced the burning of dozens of homes by the Houthi militia in several areas of the port city of Hodeidah.

Yemeni Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani said the Iran-backed group set fire to more than 40 homes in the villages of Markouda – which also houses a displacement camp – Al-Shujaira and Al-Nakhilah in the south of Hodeidah, which is controlled by the Houthi.

“The destruction of civilians’ homes by the terrorist Houthi militia in the villages south of the city of Hodeidah is an extension of its crime of destroying thousands of homes of state leaders, sheikhs, politicians, media professionals and military personnel who reject its coup in the various governorates under its control, and forcibly displacing their families, in flagrant violation of international law,” Al-Eryani said in tweet.

1- We strongly condemn the crime of burning more than (40) houses of citizens in the villages of (Al-Taif, Markoudha, Al-Shujaira, Al-Nakhila) located southern of Hodeidah city.

pic.twitter.com/hZf9b7clWa

– معمر الإرياني (@ERYANIM) [January 5, 2022](#)

Amsterdam-based human rights organization Rights Radar condemned the burning of the homes, saying Monday it amounted to a “humanitarian disaster that doubled the suffering of the people of those areas.”

It said fires destroyed 26 houses in the village of Taif, seven in Markouda, five in Al-Shujaira and four in Al-Nakhilah, most of which belonged to displaced citizens who had been fleeing the fighting since the conflict began in 2014.

Rights Radar also said local sources accused members of the Houthi militia of deliberately setting fire to the homes.

“We demand the United Nations and its mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement and human rights organizations clearly and explicitly condemn this heinous terrorist crime,” Al-Eryani said.

He also called on the international community to work on classifying the Houthi militia as a terrorist organization, and to prosecute its leaders in international courts as war criminals.



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Yemen army makes new gains in Shabwa province
Saudi Arabia's KSrelief distributes over 85 tons of food baskets to alleviate suffering of Yemenis