

Feel better now? The rise and rise of the anxiety economy

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

In 1988 a TV writer called Alex Carswell threw a pen at a photo of his mother after a stressful phone call with his boss. It gave him an idea. It was the “Age of Stress” and so the perfect time for Carswell to launch his “stress ball”.

If the 80s were the age of stress, this is the age of anxiety, with 30% of Britons experiencing an anxiety disorder during their lifetime. This has created a market for domestic anxiety cures that can be bought online, and fast.

Consider the squishy. That repeated action led to fidget spinners becoming one of the most popular items bought on Amazon in 2017. They were not simply triangles of plastic; they were a stress-relief toy. They were the stars of a growing anxiety economy.

Alongside products designed purely as medical aids, such as meditation apps, there is a thriving offshoot of lifestyle goods marketed through their anxiety-relieving qualities. Product innovation oriented around anxiety spans nearly 30 different categories, including chocolate, yogurt and air fresheners.

Is anxiety itself being commodified?

Dr Nihara Krause, founder of youth mental health charity Stem4, said, “The market seems saturated. There are a number of companies that are trading on fake news to promote a whole range of products that are meant to help with mental health problems but without any evidence base to them. Given that we are dealing with a vulnerable population it is questionable how ethical producing these tools without evidence base and systematic review of efficacy is.”

Summary: