

Podcast Age Ratings in Spain: a Case Study of the RNE Audio Platform

Calificación por edades de los podcasts en España: estudio de caso en la plataforma RNE Audio



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Abstract:

Podcasts have become a prominent medium for both information and entertainment, demonstrating their growing popularity. However, the platform has not yet established an age rating system to guide users in evaluating the suitability of content for their profile. Research demonstrates that minors are protected in their consumption of audiovisual content through the implementation of age warning codes for films, television, and video games. However, no such regulatory measures are in place for audio products. Despite the interest of governments themselves in protecting children from content that could affect their cognitive development, no guidelines for digital audio have yet been agreed or standardized. The following article will test the application of the Audio Con_Sentido (2025) code, developed by iCmedia to address this shortcoming, in podcasts on the Spanish public platform RNE Audio, which was launched in 2024. The findings corroborate the pertinence of the tool in identifying potentially harmful titles and treatments for minors, thereby validating the industry's proposal for straightforward incorporation of an audio and/or visual warning classification based on content. This would empower parents and guardians to guide the selection of podcasts available on streaming audio services.

Keywords:

Podcast, Age classification, RNE, Audio code, Childhood.

1. Introduction

Podcast consumption in Spain increased by 30% in 2024 (Spotify, 2024), and has actually doubled since 2017 (AIMC, 2024). Moreover, for the young people of Generation Z, seven out of ten find this type of digital content quite interesting. In fact, one in three users of Spotify, which is the leading audio streaming platform in Spain (Martín Barbero, 2025), listen to podcasts, placing this country among the top five in Europe with the highest percentages of podcasts on the audio consumption menu. The growth of this cultural product has multiplied this figure even further, and includes increasingly younger listeners, as pointed out by organisations and institutions that call for greater protection of minors on the Internet.

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Resumen:

El podcast se ha afianzado como un medio informativo y de entretenimiento con cada vez mayor alcance que, sin embargo, no dispone aún de un sistema de clasificación por edades que oriente sobre la adecuación de sus contenidos al perfil de cada usuario. Los menores están protegidos en el consumo audiovisual con códigos de advertencia etaria frente al cine, la televisión o los videojuegos, pero no frente a los productos sonoros. Pese al interés desde los gobiernos por proteger a la infancia de contenidos que puedan afectar a su desarrollo cognitivo, todavía no se han consensuado directrices para el audio digital. A partir del pionero código Audio Con_Sentido (2025) diseñado por iCmedia para solucionar esta carencia, este artículo testea su aplicación en los podcasts de la plataforma pública española RNE Audio (RTVE) estrenados durante 2024. Los resultados constatan la pertinencia de esta herramienta al identificar títulos y tratamientos potencialmente perjudiciales para los menores, y confirman la idoneidad de la propuesta para que la industria pueda incorporar de manera sencilla un sistema de advertencias sonoras y/o visuales referidas al contenido de audio con el fin de que padres y tutores puedan orientar la selección de podcasts de los servicios de streaming.

Palabras claves:

Podcast, Clasificación por edades, RNE, Código de audio, Infancia.

Access to audio is performed mainly through mobile devices, which children start using around the age of 12, on average, according to the Qustodio report (2024). Moreover, this report includes data from Spain, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Parents and guardians believe their children spend more time than necessary browsing the Internet, and they are concerned about the ease of access to content that is either sexual (72%), related to suicide (55%), or linked to drug and alcohol use (53%). Furthermore, self-injury, violence, and risky dares are a concern for 49% of all parents (Qustodio, 2024).

Experts agree that digital connection has a significant impact on children's cognitive and emotional development, given that the brain learns how to establish future behaviour through emotion. Consequently, easy access to harmful content has serious consequences for the mental development of children, as they are unable to either comprehend or react to certain information, behaviour, or language (ONTSI, 2023). Beyond disinformation and manipulation, national and international studies indicate that psychological and emotional damage from injurious content is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and lower emotional well-being in minors (ANAR Foundation, 2025; Ives *et al.*, 2025; PAHO, 2023; AAP, 2016). Despite the fact that parental control is exercised over audiovisual content, 41.7% of minors between the ages of 11 and 17 have seen inappropriate online content (Incibe, 2021). Thus, it is easy to imagine the amount of content they might be consuming in audio, where age ratings do not exist, as this percentage is unmeasured.

In addition to early access to technology and the amount of time spent online, the proliferation of content through the global use of smartphones means that traditional media offerings are no longer received in an organised way. Instead, such content is dispersed in a continuous flow that makes it difficult for users to know whether they are consuming a product from television, radio, newspapers, or films. Previous studies reveal that there is no standard regulation in the audiovisual sector to ensure age-appropriate consumption (Martín-Nieto, Martínez-Otón and Pedrero-Esteban, 2023).

Furthermore, the fast pace of technological change, the diversity of platforms, and the hybridization of genres and languages complicate the categorization of content even further. In short, it is increasingly difficult to stay up-to-date with the new types of distribution and access, as they are changing at a rapid pace. Protecting minors online is a continuous and growing challenge, especially considering the following statistics: in 2024, a total of 69.4% of the world's population, or 5.61 billion people, were using a mobile phone; more than 5.3 billion people were navigating the internet; and 5.4 billion individuals were using social media. Moreover, the time spent on these platforms is on the rise (Digital Report, 2024).

The ever-increasing use of technology goes hand in hand with the growing trend toward limiting the utilization of mobile devices by children. Experts suggest that screens should be avoided until the age of six; from that age onward, they should be used with adult supervision; and between the ages of 12 and 16, there should be strict parental controls both on time of use and content (Europa Press, 2024). The Draft of the Organic Law for the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments [*Anteproyecto de Ley Orgánica para la protección de los menores en los entornos digitales*] was forged by the Spanish Government in April of 2024. This law set forth both the need and objective of "guaranteeing the rights of minors in the digital sphere, the right to have their personal data protected, and the right to have access to content that is appropriate for their age" (Ministry of the Presidency, 2024). Both in the draft and in the initial work of experts, a scenario was outlined in which the responsibility of the content creation industry, as well as the role of families and other actors in society, are paramount.

Podcasts have become a culture industry that produced 209 original titles in 2023, all of which appeared on the eight main audio platforms alone. Of the 209 items, only 3% contained a recommendation or warning about content that could be inappropriate for minors (Pedrero Esteban *et al.*, 2024). Audio is proving to be a great resource for family leisure, in addition to providing classroom learning without the use of screens. Nevertheless, there is a scarce offering created ad hoc for these audiences, who often consume audio content in the company of adults who are close to them. Therefore, it is necessary for all listeners to know whether the product being accessed could be harmful to a child's normal cognitive development.

The criteria and indicators of age ratings in television, film, video streaming platforms, and video games in Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Portugal have been reviewed, organised, and systemised (Martín-Nieto, Martínez Otón, Pedrero-Esteban, 2023). However, in spite of this, it was essential to define a code for audio: an age rating system for audio content would involve protecting minors from uncontrolled access to inappropriate content and, as in other digital scenarios, this does not mean subjecting them to surveillance and monitoring (AEPD, 2023). Instead, the aim is to offer guidance for age-appropriate consumption. This objective has been achieved through the *Audio Con_Sentido* code, a project of the Federation of Associations of Media Consumers and Users [*Federación de Asociaciones de Consumidores y Usuarios de los Medios*], (iCmedia), with additional support provided by the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 (Cacharela, 2024). The code has been available for implementation by content creators, publishers, and on-demand audio platforms since February of 2025.

2. Objectives and methodology

The main objective of this research is to verify the applicability of the age rating code known as *Audio Con_Sentido*, to audio content in the Spanish podcast industry, which can serve as a consensus guide to help parents and guardians in selecting content that is appropriate for children and adolescents. The specific objective is to apply the code to the RNE Audio catalogue, which is part of the public radio and audio platform of Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE), in order to evaluate its effectiveness and determine whether it meets the necessary requirements for implementation in real environments involving audio platforms that offer streaming.

RNE Audio is an audio service that is free and on-demand. It aggregates all Spanish public radio programmes, as well as the original and exclusive audio content of RTVE Play Podcast. In July 2023 it was launched with the name RTVE Audio, and later renamed RNE Audio in 2025. In addition to the corporation's broadcasts, it also offers native podcasts, which are the subject of this research. The audio offering is available through Android and iOS mobile applications, and this radio app has become the most highly rated by users (RTVE, 2024). In the current year of 2025, an age recommendation has been included in each title in response to an editorial decision, which does not follow any particular consensus code. Instead, the suggestions were adopted based on corporate social responsibility criteria, given that the organisation in question is a public media outlet.

Regarding methodology, the testing was conducted on a sample of 22 (n=22) original podcast titles from this platform. The sample encompasses various topics, types of content, and styles, which were analysed using eight variables, 46 sub-variables, and five scaling points that were created and defined in the code proposed by iCmedia (2025). The sample comprises 352 episodes, mostly non-fiction narratives and conversational productions of varying lengths, and it was based on titles published through December of 2024.

The analysis is based on previous research using a triangulation methodology. The qualitative review regarding bibliographic data revealed the need to move beyond single-media classification systems. Although such schemes made sense in the era of analogue

television, today a new roadmap is needed in order to unify criteria that are consistent with digital content, including audio (Martín-Nieto, Martínez-Otón and Pedrero-Esteban, 2023). Moreover, in analysing the rating systems of other cultural industries in Spain and neighbouring countries, it was found that there are none for audio, including podcasts, radio, and audiobooks.

In the absence of a specific system for audio, a consensus was reached, and a code was developed. The code was created by the agents involved in child development, including families, teachers, and educational psychologists, as well as figures from the podcast industry including creators, experts, researchers, and official institutions. Next, the code was applied to the RNE Audio catalogue and monitored, which is the phase addressed in this article. To validate the test, a code book was created with indicators categorised into a matrix, which grouped together 54 variables and sub-variables, each clearly defined. This code book was used to provide a detailed age scale (six ranges), which addressed the topics covered (seven) and their extent of processing (five) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Age range classifications for the *Audio Con_Sentido* code

Age Range	Topic Categories	Degree of Application
1. Children's content (<i>CI</i>)	1. Violence	1. Not mentioned
2. Suitable for General Audiences (<i>TP</i>)	2. Gender	2. Contains a mention or reference
3. Age 7 and over (7+)	3. Fear or distress	3. Contains a clear presentation
4. Age 12 and over (12+)	4. Addictions	4. Contains a recurring presentation
5. Age 18 and over (18+)	5. Discrimination	5. Contains an idealised presentation
6. Adult content (<i>CA</i>)	6. Behaviour worth imitating	
	7. Language	

Source: iCmedia, 2025

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. The evolution of podcast penetration in Spain and its impact on children's audio

In recent decades, audio consumption has undergone a profound transformation due to the digitisation of production processes and content. This evolution has led to a proliferation of podcasts worldwide, both amateur and professional. In March of 2025, more than 4,450,000 podcasts were produced, according to real-time information from the Podcast Index. One estimate claims that there are more than 500 million listeners (Singh, 2025). Of these, more than 140 million are in the English-speaking market, and more than 110 million are in the European market sector (González, 2024). This development is also evident in Spain, where the production and consumption of podcasts has grown steadily in various sectors and audiences (Pedrero Esteban,

Barrios-Rubio and Medina-Ávila, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2025), which is redefining the way and frequency with which listeners access information and entertainment through audio.

However, despite the growing volume of production, the information related to children's audio consumption of radio and podcasts is scarce. Likewise, the latest study on radio audiences involving children from 6 to 13 years of age was conducted in 2018 by *AIMC* [association of research on communication media]. The study estimated the audience share of this age group to be around 34%. Subsequent research, including a study by Espinosa-Mirabet and Ferrer-Roca (2021), lowered the figure to 28%, unlike other countries, such as Australia, where the audience share of audio content among minors reached 80% in 2021, according to the same report.

In studies on radio audiences in Spain, the *AIMC* has chosen to use the *EGM* [general media studies] to measure the percentage of listeners aged 14 and over. Consequently, information on audio consumption in childhood and pre-adolescence is scarce and inconclusive. Moreover, research aimed at gaining knowledge of audiences in these age groups gives an isolated view of their habits and behaviour, without the potential of identifying evolution or trends over time, which is the case with older audiences (Pérez-Alaejos, Hernández-Prieto and Martín-Nieto, 2025). Consequently, this situation influences the audio content available to these age groups (Pérez-Maíllo, Sánchez-Serrano and Pedrero-Esteban, 2018). To address this situation, a report was carried out entitled, *How Podcasts Sound in Spain; an Overview of Original Productions on Digital Audio Platforms in 2022* [*Cómo suenan los podcasts en España. Radiografía de la producción original en las plataformas de audio digital en 2022*] (ONE, 2023). The report confirms that a persistent shortage of children's content on traditional radio is also the case on the main audio distribution platforms. In fact, only six original titles aimed at children were produced in 2022, and five in 2023.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) highlighted the importance of the media in promoting child welfare. However, throughout its history, Spanish radio has shown little interest in this age group. The programme entitled *Matilde, Perico y Periquín* of Cadena SER, and *Dubiñaca* of Radio España (Sánchez-Serrano and Pérez-Maíllo, 2013), are among the few examples of children's programmes that appeared on generalist radio stations in the 20th century. In recent years, Radio Nacional de España has maintained programmes such as *La estación azul de los niños*, *Crescendo*, and *Contando cuentos en R5*, yet there is still a persistent lack of children's content on private broadcasting channels (Zumeta, 2015; Martín-Nieto, Pérez-Alaejos and Hernández-Prieto, 2025).

To counteract the scarcity of children's programming on traditional radio stations, several initiatives have emerged over the decades, such as Baby Radio in the City of Cádiz, Radio Sol XXI (now Sol Radio Madrid), and Peque Radio in the Autonomous Region of Valencia, the latter of which describes itself as the first and only radio station produced by and for children. At the international level, several projects have emerged that target children and teenagers, such as Radio Junior (France), Radio Teddy (Germany), Fun Kids (the United Kingdom), and Keysforkids (the United States), all of which are committed to children's radio (Barbeito Veloso and Perona Páez, 2018).

3.2. Digitisation and the new opportunities for children's audio

With the general spread of the Internet, along with the rise of podcasting, the production of audio content for children has been revitalized, yet there is still a lack of enthusiasm. Edison Research (2023) found that in the USA, 46% of children between the

ages of 6 and 12 have listened to a podcast at some point, and 30% have done so in the last month. In Spain, the transition from traditional radio to digital platforms has enabled the creation of projects such as Baby Radio, founded in 2011. This venture started with digital broadcasting, then made the leap to radio waves, and ultimately evolved into a content ecosystem that includes podcasts, a YouTube channel, an in-house app, and an audio distribution platform (Piñeiro-Otero and Pedrero-Esteban, 2022). Another noteworthy example is XL Kids Radio, which operated from 2016 to 2019 with an educational approach aimed at fostering children's creativity and imagination. However, the economic viability of these projects remains a challenge, which has led some of them to explore subscription models and income diversification.

One example of generating additional income can be found in the innovative marketing strategies of podcasts, which have combined children's content with monetisation through branded podcasts such as Fisher Price's *El Sonajero*. This programme was launched in 2018 on the Podium Podcast platform with nearly 60 items aimed at babies. Examples include the podcasts "Placentera", "Dale al play", and "Bebé a bordo", with another for their families, which includes a space for relaxed discussions about motherhood and fatherhood (MarketingNews, 2018). Other series also premiered on the same platform, such as *Inés y los huevos mágicos* with four episodes, and *Ídolos*, a podcast about famous musical artists. The latter was also broadcast on the radio station Los 40 Classic, which even led to several concerts taking place (Fisher, 2021).

3.3. *The platformisation of children's audio: New trends and business models*

In the 2020s, children's audio consumption has found a new space for growth on digital platforms. In 2022, projects such as Nubba and Ditto emerged in Spain, both of which focused on safe and supervised content for children under 9 years of age. Nubba evolved from Baby Radio, the former of which stands out for its community of more than 500,000 monthly listeners, access by subscription, and forming part of the Babypar service. Ditto, on the other hand, emphasises the educational value of audio and is backed by the Chair of Neuroeducation at the University of Barcelona, who asserts that consuming audio without images assists cognitive development (Ditto.es, 2024).

At the international level, platforms such as Pinna (USA) and Keeku (France) have managed to attract child audiences by using subscriptions, or through funding schemes involving advertising suitable for minors (Vázquez, 2020). These projects reinforce the idea that children's audio not only has great potential as an alternative to screens. In fact, this tool is both educational and entertaining (Martín-Nieto, Pérez-Alaejos and Hernández-Prieto, 2025).

In recent years, these services have been joined by other types of audio access that are experiencing strong growth in some European countries (DosDoce, 2023). In fact, children's audio has the opportunity to gain momentum thanks to the proliferation of specific listening devices such as Jooki, Yoto, and Storybutton, which try to offer a safe, screen-free experience (Vázquez, 2023). Given the context, radio and podcasting face the challenge of adapting their strategy for the purpose of attracting a generation that accesses content in a fragmented and multi-platform way. At the same time, they need to ensure that access is safe, educational, and entertaining. To do so, both families and teachers must know for whom each title is recommended before offering or prescribing audio content, so as to ensure safe access to the listening items in question.

3.4. Design of the Audio Con_Sentido code

Previous research has been conducted on age rating systems for diverse audiovisual industries such as film, TV, OTT platforms, and video games, which has occurred in Spain, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Portugal (Martín-Nieto, Martínez-Otón, Pedrero-Esteban, 2023). These investigations have laid the foundation for the development of the *Audio Con_Sentido* age rating code, which adheres to the guidelines for the rating of audiovisual content contained in the resolution known as CRITERIOS/DTSA/001/15. This resolution was a combined effort of the National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC), as well as the Draft Bill of the Organic Law for the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments (April 2024).

There is widespread social interest in protecting children from the decisive influence of the cultural and leisure industries. This has led to the creation of focus groups comprising agents involved in the education of minors, including their families, teachers, psychology and educational professionals, as well as audio and podcast experts. The aim of the first focus groups was to discover how this audience relates to audio, and how audio is associated with education and the positive development of children and adolescents. To do so, the authors took into account the categories and themes identified. As for the research with audio professionals, the relevance and viability of the ratings code was discussed. Lastly, the results were shared with several official organisations involved in child protection in this area, such as the CNMC (National Commission on Markets and Competition), as well as the Secretariat of State for Digitisation and Artificial Intelligence, under the auspices of the Spanish National Government. This approach made it possible to refine more precisely both the age categories and the issues related to protection.

Figure 2. Age ranges of the *Audio Con_Sentido* code

Ranking		Description
	Children's content	<i>Podcasts designed or adapted for children, with themes or tones specifically aimed at child audiences.</i>
	General audiences	<i>Podcasts that do not feature or present any content considered harmful to the development of minors.</i>
	Ages 7 and over	<i>Podcasts that make slight and brief references, whether real, unreal, or make-believe, to language, issues or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group.</i>
	Ages 12 and over	<i>Podcasts that clearly feature or portray, in a realistic, unrealistic, or make-believe way, any issues, language or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group.</i>

	Ages 18 and over	<i>Podcasts that repeatedly and explicitly feature or portray, in a realistic, unrealistic, or imaginary way, any issues, language or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group.</i>
	Adult content	<i>Podcasts that advocate, normalize, or portray in an idealized manner any issues, language or approaches that are harmful to the development of minors.</i>

Source: iCmedia, 2025

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The code design encompasses the following six age categories: 1) Children’s content (*CI*), including podcasts designed or adapted for children, with themes or tones specifically aimed at child audiences; 2) General audiences (*TP*), or podcasts that do not feature or present any content considered harmful to children’s development; 3) Ages 7 and over (*7+*), which covers podcasts that make slight and brief references, whether real, unreal or make-believe, to language, issues or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group; 4) Ages 12 and over (*12+*), includes podcasts that clearly present or depict, in a real, unreal or imaginary way, any issues, language or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group; 5) Aged 18 and over (*18+*), refers to podcasts that repeatedly and explicitly present or depict issues, language, or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group; and 6) Adult content, which includes podcasts that advocate, normalize, or portray in an idealized manner any issues, language or approaches that are harmful to the development of minors (Figure 2).

The rationale for assessing the suitability of podcasts is based on the narrative language of audio. This includes the words, music, and sound effects used to describe, portray, or set the scene for situations that try to produce a specific effect on the listener, both in conversational podcasts, as well as in non-fiction and fictional narratives. Regarding the latter (non-fiction and fiction), Rodero (2024) points out that “the combination of the two has resulted in a new and original sound dimension capable of conjuring any reality”. In establishing guidelines for the scaled age recommendations for listening, which were organised according to levels of intensity, the content was grouped and categorised in a way that was similar to the audiovisual codes described above. Moreover, the main objective of the code is to highlight positive content for new listeners.

4. Results

4.1. Podcast age ratings based on the Audio Con Sentido code

Once the *Audio Con Sentido* age rating code had been designed (iCmedia, 2025), its viability and efficiency were tested by applying it to the content offered by RNE Audio (RTVE). This enabled the identification of materials that are suitable or unsuitable for children and adolescents on this platform. In this research, the 22 original native titles produced and released by RNE Audio were examined, from the date of its launch until December 31, 2024. This sample involved exploring a total of 352 episodes, which is an average of 16 episodes per title. *Diario de Ucrania* was the title with the highest number of episodes with a total of 53,

followed by *Diosas y rebeldes* with 47, and *Esto merece una explicación* with 33. By contrast, *Sapiensantes* had the fewest episodes released in 2024 with three, followed by *Econoclan*, *El profesor Melorock*, and *Las tumbas de Gaztambide*, with four episodes each. In terms of genre, the catalogue examined is divided between non-fiction narratives and conversation programmes. The former account for more than 77% of the total, while the latter comprise just five titles, which is slightly less than 23%. This distribution is noteworthy, as the former require a larger budget and production effort than the latter. It also bears mentioning that among the original native podcasts produced and released in 2024, which make up the sample, RNE Audio does not have any titles devoted to audio fiction, despite RNE's long history of producing and promoting this genre.

To achieve the main objective of this research, detailed listening was carried out in order to analyse the individual content of each episode. During the listening, the *Audio Con_Sentido* code was applied to the podcast, which had been developed in prior research and previously published by the Federation of Associations for Media Quality (iCmedia, 2025). As noted earlier, the code provides protection against seven topic categories: 1. Violence; 2. Sex; 3. Fear or distress; 4. Addictions; 5. Discrimination; 6. Imitative behaviour; and 7. Language. Each category contained several specific situations, along with six age categories. The age rating of each title was determined according to the frequency and intensity with which the themes appear, based on the following criteria: no mention; slightly mentioned; noticeable presence; repeated presence; and a highly frequent presence.

Among the 22 titles analysed, five (22.7%) are specifically aimed at children, as they offer child content, or *CI*. Thus, these items include themes and aesthetics suitable for this age group and encompass the following programs: *¿Y si...?*, *Econoclan*, *El profesor Melorock*, *Sapiensantes*, and *Protagonistas del aula*, all of which are non-fiction narratives except for the last, which is a conversation program based on interviews. Moreover, all these titles have seven episodes or fewer, with the exception of *¿Y si...?*, which is a podcast that answers interesting questions in less than 15 minutes, and which released 28 episodes in 2024 (8% of the catalogue). These items ensure content that is safe for children and can be recommended by families and teachers for listening. In fact, they could even be consumed without adult supervision, if necessary (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Podcasts with Child Content (CI) that premiered in 2024



Covers of: *¿Y si...?*, *Econoclan*, *El profesor Melorock*, *Sapiensantes*, and *Protagonistas del aula*. Source: RNE Audio

The catalogue also includes titles intended for General Audiences (*TP*). This means that although they are not specifically aimed at children, they can be enjoyed by listeners of all ages, including families, since they do not contain or represent any content that

is inappropriate for minors. Four titles have been identified in this category, which account for 18% of the offering analysed, and include the following: *De éxodos*, *Educando emociones*, *Locos por los clásicos*, and *Redes de aprendizaje*.

Regarding genre, or the story development, the podcasts are mostly non-fiction narratives, including reports and short documentaries. The only conversation program in this category is *Redes de aprendizaje*. This program delves into education and psychology, and is aimed not only at families, but also professionals who work in child and adolescent education. Among these titles, the number of episodes varies considerably, ranging from 8 episodes in *De éxodos*, to 31 in *Redes de aprendizaje*, 16 in *Educando emociones*, and 22 in *Locos por los clásicos* (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Podcasts with content for General Audiences (TP) released in 2024



Covers of: *De Éxodos*, *Educando emociones*, *Locos por los clásicos*, and *Redes de aprendizaje*. Source: RNE Audio

The third age group defined by the *Audio Con Sentido* code is 7+, which encompasses podcasts not recommended for children under seven years of age. This category includes titles that “make slight and fleeting references, whether real, unreal, or imaginary, to language, topics, or approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group” (iCmedia, 2025). RNE Audio has identified three titles with this rating, which comprise 13% of the total and have more than 40 episodes. The three titles include, *Las abogadas*, *La verdadera historia*, *Las tumbas de Gaztambide*, and *Esto merece una explicación*. Three-quarters of the episodes belong to *Esto merece una explicación*, a podcast that provides information and context on current issues in about 30 minutes.

Figure 5. Podcasts with content for children over 7 years of age released in 2024



Covers of: *Esto merece una explicación*, *Las abogadas*, and *Las tumbas de Gaztambide*. Source: RNE Audio

Placing these titles in the 7+ category of the code is an indication of content that should be brought to the audience's attention. For example, in *Esto merece una explicación*, some episodes mention or allude to the "consumption of drugs and other addictive substances such as tobacco and alcohol" (point 4.1 of the code). Another example is *Las abogadas. La verdadera historia*, which contains references to the intentional use of physical violence, torture, murder, and similar acts (point 1.1). *Las tumbas de Gaztambide* includes allusions to "stimuli that include fear, revulsion, and terror, and an atmosphere of dread and foreboding" (point 3.3 of the code), and is therefore classified as 7+. *Las abogadas. La verdadera historia*, is the only one of the three that is a conversation program based on interviews with the protagonists, while the other two are non-fiction narratives such as documentaries and reports.

The category for age 12+ includes "podcasts that clearly present or portray themes, language, and approaches that are harmful to the development of this age group, regardless of whether they are displayed in a manner that is real, unreal, or imaginary." Once the code was applied, this category contained the highest number of titles in the RNE Audio catalogue, with a total of seven (31% of the catalogue) and 155 episodes (44% of the total). These productions include the following:

Figure 6. Podcasts with content for listeners aged 12 and over released in 2024



Covers of: *Diario de Ucrania*, *Diosas y rebeldes*, *Germen*, *Hey!*, *Las del Cadillac*, *Megamix-El Podcast*, and *Tamayazo*. Source: RNE Audio

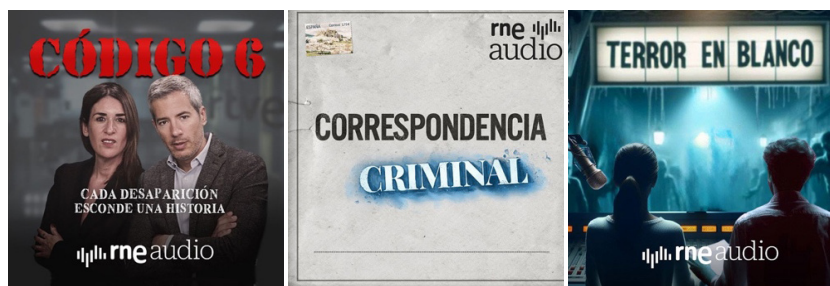
The code recommends placing this content in this age group for various reasons. Of the seven titles, three contain content related to violence: *Diosas y rebeldes* and *Megamix brutal* are addressed by 1.1 of the code, which refers to clear depictions of physical injury, including the intentional use of bodily aggression, torture, murder, and similar acts. The third title, *Diario de Ucrania* refers

to the clear presence of content related to the “use of weapons, or situations of armed conflict such as explosions, gunfire, combat, or content that promotes war”.

Some of these titles also include references to sex, which is the second content category of the code. On the one hand, *Diosas y rebeldes* refers or alludes to non-consensual acts such as rape and sexual abuse, which is addressed in point 2.4 of the code. On the other hand, the podcast *Hey!*, which is devoted to Julio Iglesias, mentions or implies “the use of sexual language, including references, pranks, or dirty jokes about sex”, which is covered in point 2.7 of the code. The third potentially harmful type of content covered by the code is fear. In this case, only *Diosas y rebeldes* contains references not recommended for children under 12, as it clearly includes the “death or abandonment of characters who are close to the child’s family or emotional environment, which could result in emotional distress among listeners”; in addition, some of its episodes contain “scenes of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, avalanches, and other calamities, as well as portrayals of the victims of these catastrophes”.

Another category of content deemed suitable for viewers aged 12 and over is imitative behaviour (category 6 of the code): for example, the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, or the inducement to consume, is clearly presented in *Las del Cadillac*, in addition to situations of institutional corruption, either public or private, in the analyses of *Megamix brutal* and *Tamayazo*. Regarding the conversations in *Germen*, the authors have found that the way language is used would place this podcast in the 12+ category, as it clearly contains offensive language, or blasphemy, which is coarse, obscene, inappropriate, and indecent (point 7 of the code). All of the podcasts in this category are non-fiction narratives with the exception of two, which are based on interviews: *Germen* and *Las del Cadillac*.

Figure 7. Podcasts with content for adults aged 18+ released in 2024



Covers of: *Código 6*, *Correspondencia Criminal*, and *Terror en blanco*. Source: RNE Audio

There are three titles for adults over 18 years of age in the RNE Audio catalogue from 2024, with a total of 31 episodes (8.8% of the total). All three are non-fiction narratives: *Código 6* tells the true stories of people who have disappeared; *Correspondencia criminal* gathers the letters of correspondence between a journalist and convicted criminals; and *Terror en blanco* recounts terrifying stories. All these podcasts repeatedly and explicitly present or depict themes, language or coverage that is harmful to the development of minors under the age of 18, as established by the *Audio Con Sentido* code. The first two include repeated references to the following: physical attacks (1.1); psychological violence (1.2); damage to property or heritage assets through

vandalism, robbery, theft, and other means (2.4); and the explicit display of minors as either the perpetrators or victims of violence (2.8).

Código 6 also includes repeated portrayals of fear through the death or abandonment of characters close to a child's family or personal environment, which could result in emotional distress among listeners (3.1). On the other hand, *Terror en blanco* repeatedly presents situations that provoke fear, such as settings related to terror or fright (3.3), including paranormal content, exorcism, and the presence of diabolical forces, which are displayed for the purpose of generating fear or distress (3.7).

Finally, the authors have not found any titles with content alluding to category 5 of the code, which addresses discrimination, including references to negative stereotypes, insults, degrading jokes, intimidation, and aggression based on race, gender, religious beliefs, country of origin, age, etc. Nor did the authors find any titles that support discrimination against individuals or groups, nor depict minors as the main characters or witnesses. Lastly, no content was found in the catalogue that could be classified as adult content (CA). Such items are labelled with a red colour, which warns users of podcasts that either advocate, mainstream, or idealize topics, language, or coverage that is harmful to the development of minors.

4.2. Comparative analysis of the RNE Audio recommendation system

Since autumn 2024, RNE Audio has been introducing information on age recommendations into the metadata of its podcasts. This is a pioneering initiative in Spain, as previous research (Pedrero-Esteban *et al.*, 2024) has shown that distribution platforms that offer streaming of voice audio lack this type of information. In fact, only 3.3% of the podcasts produced and released in 2023 had warnings about unsuitable content for children or sensitive audiences, mainly on Audible and Spotify. Moreover, such warnings were offered in isolated titles rather than appearing broadly in all titles of a particular platform. In the case of RNE Audio, the warning is available on its app, but not on its website. Moreover, to access the information, you must enter each title individually, go to the details tab, and search in that section for information on the recommended age. Although this feature is not yet available for the entire catalogue, such information seems to be of concern to the platform due to its public service mandate.

As noted previously, this research applied the age classification code for audio to RNE's offering, with the findings outlined above. These were then compared with the labels included in the RNE Audio application in order to verify whether the recommendations matched. As seen in Figure 8, in addition to titles without warnings, other titles show matching results, while others differ.

Eight of the 22 titles analysed from RNE Audio lack age recommendations, or similar information, which would give the audience a preview of the content they would find before listening. This, in turn, would reduce the chances of such content being recommended by parents or educators for children. Of the remaining 14 titles, seven match the age ratings of the *Audio Con Sentido* code, which include the three podcasts rated 18+, two rated 12+ (*Germen* and *Las del Cadillac*), and another aimed at children. In the research, the four podcasts classified as specifically intended for children (*CI*) are categorized by RNE Audio as *TP* (General Audiences). By contrast, those classified as *TP* in the code do not have any age recommendations in RNE Audio.

Figure 8. Comparison of age ratings between RNE Audio and the *Audio Con Sentido* code

Title	Age Classification of RNE Audio	Age Classification of the <i>Audio Con Sentido</i> Code
1. ¿Y si...?	Child Content	Child Content
2. Código 6	18+	18+
3. Correspondencia criminal	18+	18+
4. De Éxodos	None	General Audiences
5. Diario de Ucrania	7+	12+
6. Diosas y rebeldes	None	12+
7. Econoclan	General Audiences	Child Content
8. Educando emociones	None	General Audiences
9. El profesor Melorock	General Audiences	Child Content
10. Esto merece una explicación	7+	7+
11. Germen	12+	12+
12. Hey!	None	12+
13. Las abogadas.	12+	7+
14. Las del Cadillac	12+	12+
15. Las tumbas de Gaztambide	None	7+
16. Locos por los clásicos	None	General Audiences
17. Megamix brutal	None	12+
18. Protagonistas del aula	General Audiences	Child Content
19. Redes de aprendizaje	None	General Audiences
20. Sapiensantes	General Audiences	Child Content
21. Tamayazo	18+	12+
22. Terror en Blanco	18+	18+

Source: created by the authors

Regarding the comparison, it bears mentioning that three of the podcasts have different ratings: *Diario de Ucrania* is classified by RNE Audio as 7+, yet the rating for this podcast is 12+ according to the code; *Las abogadas. La verdadera historia* is rated by the code as 7+, but RNE Audio places it at 12+; and *Tamayazo*, which is rated by the code as 12+, is designated as 18+ by RNE Audio. After consulting those in charge of the platform, it was found that this pioneering initiative does not adhere to a pre-defined code book. Instead, they have chosen to categorize productions using common sense, rather than relying on systematic criteria such as those included in the *Audio Con Sentido* code, which has seven themes and five levels of scaled classifications.

It has also been observed that RNE Audio has five age groups: a) specifically recommended for children; b) General Audiences; c) 7+; d) 12+; and e) 18+. However, the criteria for placing a title in one age category or another are not specified. As a public service for the production and distribution of digital audio, it would be advisable for RNE Audio to apply the proposed code, which has been approved by teachers, psychologists, educators, families, and audio experts, in addition to being endorsed by the CNMC and the Secretariat of State for Digitisation. The code could serve as a benchmark and driving force for the industry's commitment to children, especially in the case of private platforms, which have a much wider reach. Moreover, it would enable easy access to safe listening for children, create a closer link between the industry and its audience, and increase listener trust in the industry itself.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Experts working in this field advocate the need to protect children on all fronts in order to preserve their mental health and, consequently, their development. In general terms, the key areas of support in the online environment include prevention in the classroom, effective regulation of the digital realm, investment in shared responsibility on platforms, and assistance for families. Specifically, this proposal focuses on the audio environment.

The absence of a broad agreement regarding an age rating system for audio content stands in sharp contrast to the solid, well-established regulations in other audiovisual media, both analogue and digital, which encompass films, television, SVOD services, and video games. Moreover, this situation is compounded by the significant rise in podcast consumption, which is largely driven by the incessant growth of mobile phone use by young people. Consequently, this scenario creates a more urgent need to implement measures to protect the cognitive development of children and adolescents.

This research has confirmed the viability of applying an age-based guidance code for audio to the RNE Audio catalogue, which includes 352 episodes and 22 titles from 2024. Furthermore, this total ranges from productions aimed at children to content intended for adults over 18 years of age. The seven themes of the code, which include violence, sex, fear, addiction, discrimination, imitative behaviour, and language, have been integrated into the analysis among six age groups and five levels of intensity. The code allows each episode to be classified easily and rigorously, which makes it an efficient tool with the potential to be adopted by the audio industry in the future.

It also paves the way for families and teachers to have a reliable guide they can use before recommending or allowing listening. During the research, it was observed that RNE Audio is starting to incorporate age metadata into some of its titles. However, the results indicate that its classification system has a shortcoming, as it still needs to be based on clear and easily applied criteria, as evidenced by the following findings: Eight of the 22 podcasts analysed do not provide any age recommendations, and only half

of the designations match those of the code. This discrepancy highlights the need for a single, rigorous standard, which must be endorsed by experts in education, psychology, and the media in order to ensure transparency and safety.

However, the exponential growth in supply often makes it difficult to distinguish appropriate content. The proposal in this paper, which is in line with the Draft of the Organic Law for the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments, offers a practical solution: an age classification code for audio content, which is applied by the industry and well-known to the public. Furthermore, RNE Audio has taken an interest in this expert-endorsed classification system, and it had planned to incorporate the code into its new productions in the summer of 2025. In addition, the proposal offered by this research opens up new lines of investigation in this area. As a final thought, the widespread implementation of this age rating system on podcast platforms has the potential not only to enhance the industry’s social responsibility status, but also to promote safe access to children’s audio, which is in line with the child protection guidelines set forth by the *AEPD*.

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Discussion and conclusions	Rebeca Martín-Nieto, Laura Martínez-Otón, Luis Miguel Pedrero-Esteban, Ana Pérez-Escoda
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8. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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