

Google searchers find ‘incompetent’ Ma a ‘bad omen’

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The first two options search engine Google Taiwan offers when a user starts to key in the president's name — Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) — are “incompetent (無能)” and “bad omen (凶兆).”

Popular links related to a search target automatically show in a drop-down menu on Google when an Internet user types the first word about the target. After typing in the first two characters of the president's name, “Ma” (馬) and “Ying” (英) in Google Taiwan's search bar, suggested popular links with words including “the incompetent Ma Ying-jeou” and “Ma Ying-jeou brings bad luck” pop up.

Those two words do not automatically show up when “Ma Ying-jeou” is keyed into another popular online search engine, Yahoo Taiwan.

Presidential Office spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) said that most people who know how search engines work can manipulate the results and that negative pages about Ma appearing among suggested popular links does not necessarily reflect what most Internet users are searching for.

Google denied the phenomenon was the result of manipulation. Suggested popular links are automatically selected by the system based on what most Internet users are looking for on Google Taiwan, it said.

It is normal that negative search results would be among the most popular links on the search engine, especially during a period of time when Internet users are eager to find out more about a celebrity's negative news, it said, adding that the same phenomenon also occurs to foreign political leaders such as US President Barrack Obama and former US president George W. Bush.

When former president Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁) name is entered into Google Taiwan, “court verdict” and “indictment” are among the first terms the search engine offers.

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