

BY JANET SMITH

If *TV Tonight's* chatty mole in the television industry is right, something momentous has happened in South African broadcasting history.

Unless something equally momentous happens overnight, our most famous talk show host, Felicia Mabuza-Suttle, will this

morning have announced her move from the most successful TV channel in the country (SABC1) to the channel that would be the most successful (e.tv), opening the way for the industry to finally create a true celebrity culture in this country.

If a major talk show host is soon introduced in the same time-slot as Felicia on another channel (Phat Joe, anyone?),

offering her some real competition, the excitement could spread.

At the moment, all the channels are wasting opportunities to shift the status quo and create superstars.

If, for instance, SABC2 was clever, it would put *Buzz* and Carol Mogale up against *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and Jeremy Maggs on a Sunday evening. And

SABC3 would put *Special Assignment* up against *Carte Blanche*.

England's TV screens are full of highly paid celebrity rivals who play musical chairs with the channels. Were this England, Maggs, for example, would have been earning a lot more than the whole lot of money he's being paid to host *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* from Johannesburg. He

## HAS THE ERA OF TV SUPERSTARS BEGUN?

**Moving on up ...** Felicia Mabuza-Suttle could, appropriately, have started a new celebrity culture in this country



could sell his talents to the highest bidder:

In a way, it's fitting that Felicia – repeatedly named one of South Africa's "most influential people" – should be the first talk host to make a celebrity move.

She has faced more devastating criticism than any other TV personality in this country. And when you have critics discussing you at length and – if you're

amenable to it – ripping your self-esteem to shreds, you know you've made it. Otherwise, why would they bother?

For all the public beatings, Felicia has held her ground. Sometimes it's hard to believe that a high-profile personality, who is clearly making good money, is also a devoted humanitarian. She has never ceased to insist that her talk show is her

mission and contribution to the country – it's not for profit or self-aggrandisement.

A new talk show on a new channel could well uncover a different Felicia. She's already a household name – also for her ability to reinvent herself as she did with her unabashed cosmetic surgery.

To a greater rather than a lesser extent, she's earned the respect of the viewing

public. A move to e.tv could, again, see her attracting massive media attention.

Felicia first won awards for *Top Level*, the original version of *The Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Show*. Remember "the talk show that gets South Africa talking"? Her SABC1 slogan has been "the talk show where ordinary people say extraordinary things".

What will her next slogan be?