Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the opportunities offered by the establishment of a digital university, especially when the covid-19 pandemic has disturbed the functioning of the whole education system. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Introduce Covid-19 pandemic and disturbance that has caused in the whole education system.
- Discuss the opportunities offered by the establishment of a digital university.
- Discuss what can be the potential challenges of digital education.
- Conclude with a way forward.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the education sector. But even before the pandemic, the lack of an adequate number of universities led to limited options for aspiring students. This created a need to reform the way in which we impart higher education.

The surge of digital technologies provided a whole new view to imagine teaching-learning methods, university governance systems, higher education goals, and how future universities are perceived by employers. The Budget 2022-23 announced the establishment of a digital university. This is a decision of great significance as a digital university will provide better access to high-quality higher education.

Body

Prospects of Digital university

- **Inefficiency of the Current Model of Learning:** There is an increasing recognition that the current university model is rigid and that traditional universities have failed to customise education to take care of needs, interests, financial capabilities, and diverse cognitive abilities of students.

    - Thus, the educators and policymakers feel the need to create flexible educational systems to provide customised high-quality "anytime/anywhere" education.
- **Economic Advantage:** Such pre-packaged education by academics would help in achieving the economies of scale required in India.
- **Being Updated with Technology:** With emerging technologies driving information economies, it also becomes necessary for those employed to acquire new skills relevant to their changing roles. The current model is of little help in this context.
- **Contributing in Scientific Advancements:** Since the digital university will be built on a networked hub-spoke model, it can develop cutting-edge information and communications technology platforms and digital content, using emerging technologies such as AI, machine learning, virtual reality, augmented reality, and blockchain.

Challenges in setting and working of Digital Education

- Online learning via digital universities raises questions about how far will online education help

support greater access to and success in higher education among those who are on the margins.
- Online teaching should not be confused with meaningful education. It may provide some engagement when schools are closed, but is pedagogically inferior to in-person learning within the learning community of the classroom and the school.
- The first-generation aspirants have no cultural capital to bank on while struggling their way through college.

  - These students are also from the other side of the digital divide which makes them vulnerable to a double disadvantage if digital modes become the mainstay of education.
- Digital learning is further associated with a plethora of socio-economic problems ranging from intermittent Internet connectivity and frequent power cuts to financial constraints in procuring a high-speed Internet connection and limited access to digital literacy and devices among college goers in the country.

Conclusion

While digital forms of learning have the potential to enable students to pursue independent learning, conventional and digital forms of education should not be considered mutually exclusive. They both should go hand in hand.